POINT OF VIEW:

EXAMINING THE MAGAZINE INDUSTRY STANDARD

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

POINT OF VIEW :

EXAMINING THE MAGAZINE INDUSTRY STANDARD

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a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

Point of view permeates every aspect of magazines. As a relatively modern concept, the journalistic device went previously unstudied in scholarly form. The research question, "How and why do U.S. consumer magazine writers and editors establish point of view in their publications?" was posed to 11 magazine professionals, including writers and editors, using in-depth interview techniques. What emerged was a definition of the concept: Point of view is a journalistic technique found primarily in magazines that incorporates framing, explanatory journalism, tone, voice and analysis. Apart from framing theory, the concept of pragmatic objectivity and the history of the medium were used to better understand point of view.

Editors and writers were divided into five groups: high-end general-interest publications, newsweeklies, city and regional magazines, niche publications and men's and women's magazines. Two individuals were interviewed from each category, except for high-end general interest, which had three participants. Participants included the voice of the movement, Richard Stengel of *Time* magazin*e*, as well as David Von Drehle of *Time*, John Byrne of *BusinessWeek*, Lauren Collins of *The New Yorker*, Garrett Graff of *The Washingtonian*, Vanessa Grigoriadis of *Rolling Stone*, *New York Magazine* and *Vanity Fair*, Justin Heckert of *ESPN The Magazine*, Tom Junod of *Esquire*, David Katz of *Esquire*, Todd Purdum of *Vanity Fair* and Scott Stossel of *The Atlantic*.

Chapter I

Introduction

In August 2007, *Journalism Studies* devoted the entire issue to magazines to prove a point: Magazines are terribly underrepresented in mass media research, and one issue devoted to the medium could start filling the research gap. Tim Holmes' guest editor's introduction, "Mapping the Magazine," explains the unfortunate scholarly neglect while also taking time to describe the eclectic field. Holmes (2007) writes:

> Magazines, then, are vectors of pleasure, they encourage the acquisition of knowledge, they may play an important role in the formation of identity, they are open to resistant readings, they easily encompass and incorporate flexible and varying conditions of consumption and production, and they form a readily accessible community focus. All this is rolled into a highly successful cultural form—yet it is a form which scholars have, with a few exceptions, tended to underestimate and overlook (p. 511).

Scholars, however, have acknowledged the lack of attention in the past. Twelve years prior, David Abrahamson, who contributed to the 2007 *Journalism Studies* magazine issue, described research surrounding the field as fragmented and incomplete. He coined the phrase "brilliant fragments" to describe scholarly work at the time, which was well-researched but lacked ties to a larger framework. Abrahamson (1995) writes, "As a generalization about journalism scholarship, magazines as a research subject certainly have drawn less attention than either newspapers or television" (p. xviii). He continues and says that scholarship about U.S. magazines can be characterized as a chronicle that lacks broad historical interpretations. It also fails to define editorial and economic realities of the industry as well as the conflict between them (p. xix). "The principle

reason for this approach is that in most instances media scholars have generally chosen to study magazines as isolated journalistic artifacts, rather than as interesting products and catalysts of social, cultural, and economic change" (p. xix). What scholars are missing out on is the storied history that encompasses early partisanship leanings, eventual attempts at objectivity, the disappearing act of the general-interest publication, the rise of niche magazines and the changing styles of narrative writing. What also developed, however, is a concept that qualifies as media jargon and a magazine industry standard: point of view.

Point of view is a storytelling technique employed by magazine writers and editors. It utilizes functions of framing in terms of selection and interpretation while challenging notions of objectivity. Just as scholarship regarding magazines is scant, so are specific studies on point of view. There is a substantial gap in the research, and to start filling it, this study sought an understanding of editors' and writers' motivations behind using point of view. The research question posed was, "How and why do U.S. consumer magazine writers and editors establish point of view in their publications?" By using the theoretical concepts of pragmatic objectivity and framing, the history of the medium, past framing studies, such as textual analyses, and, ultimately, in-depth interviews, an answer began to take shape. It's a gradual process but one in which both practice and theory can coalesce for a greater understanding of the segmented medium scholars have chosen to ignore on the larger, more ideological scale.

Chapter II

A Review of the Literature

An Abbreviated History of Magazines in the U.S.

In 1741, the first magazine was published in the United States. Whether Benjamin Franklin or Andrew Bradford gets credit for putting the first publication to press is debatable, but it is certain that they were entering into unchartered American territory with goals of influencing popular thought. Wood (1956) writes: "From the beginning the magazine's intent was the widest possible dissemination of important information, a basic intent of today's national magazines. They were founded, too, with the very definite intent of influencing public opinion, particularly one crucial subject. ... The earliest American magazines were out, then, to influence opinion in the Colonies and opinion in England" (p. 12-13). According to Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991), there was no pressing need for a new journalistic medium. Original audiences were small and elite, and costs were high. "With such immediate difficulties, and a host of others, it is surprising that even Franklin would attempt a magazine, yet between 1741 and 1794, forty-five brave printer-publishers made the attempt" (Tebbel & Zuckerman, 1991, p. 4). And many quickly failed. Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991) write: "Obviously, a new medium was being born in America after the Revolution, but it had been a hard and exceedingly slow birth since 1741. From that date until 1794, there were never more than three magazines in the country at any one time, and half of those published in the period were issued

during its last eight years" (p. 5). In spite of magazines' bleak survival rates, the medium was carving a place for itself in the journalism landscape.

The 18th century had its share of successes as well. According to Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991): "What emerged from the clutter of verbiage in the eighteenth-century magazines was a composite picture of the nation's social and political life, in greater depth than the newspapers could provide, particularly when illustrations appeared. The writing was often atrocious, and much material was borrowed at first, but magazines from the beginning held up the mirror to national life, thus becoming a prime source for the social historian" (p. 7). The 19th century brought great advancements for the industry, namely in finding audiences and establishing general-interest publications. Moving away from the elite foundations, magazines were able to enjoy more impressive success rates with additional readers. Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991) write:

> As magazines found their audiences in this expanding national market, the broad pattern of the future industry began to be established. Specialized audiences developed quickly, particularly those for religious journals, but the major event after 1825 was the rise of the general magazine, which would dominate the consumer field until our own time (p. 8).

In addition to religious journals were medical journals, theater reviews, comic periodicals, humor magazines and significant content directed toward women. This all led to the "Golden Age of Magazines," which began after 1825 and lasted until 1850. By the 1850s, the business was specialized with magazine professionals and imagined communities were being established. (Tebbel & Zuckerman, 1991, p. 11-12). "Nevertheless, in spite of all caveats, American magazines were offering readers a comprehensive view of national life in the 1850s—a mirror held up to an expanding, struggling, chaotic country that was on the verge of post-war greatness" (Tebbel &

Zuckerman, 1991, p. 13). Post-war, the field continued toward specialization and started looking more like today's industry with improved writing and a diversity of interests. According to Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991), "By 1885, there were periodicals for every occupation, activity, or interest, and that specialization has persisted until it has become the prime characteristic of the industry" (p. 62).

Magazines continued to develop in the 20th century, especially post-World War II. The number of publications ballooned, distribution improved, and segmentation and specialization persisted. Finances were already becoming problematic, but surviving in journalism has never been guaranteed. "One thing is certain. There is a magazine for every human being in the United States who can read, and there is no interest known to mankind which does not have at least one magazine to serve it" (Tebbel & Zuckerman, 1991, p. 244). Those words ring even truer 18 years after they were written, and in many ways, they reflect some of the earliest journalistic practices.

Objectivity as a Journalistic Standard

American journalism in the 18th century was epitomized by partisanship. Newspapers and magazines supported entire party lines. Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991) write: "The line between magazines and newspapers was still blurred in the late eighteenth century in terms of content. After the Revolution, both continued to devote much space to politics, and both printed a good deal of literary material" (p. 6). This didn't change until the emergence of objectivity in the 19th century. "Independent" newspapers launched in the early 1800s under the blanket title of the "penny press" (Mindich 1998). Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991) write:

> After 1835, with the advent of James Gordon Bennett and his New York *Herald*, newspapers devoted themselves more and more to coverage of the news. Before that, they had been little more than propaganda organs in the hands of political parties, on whose bounty they were largely dependent. At about the same time, magazines were becoming forums for public opinion in ways they had not been before, by their nature offering a more varied and more intellectual sounding board for political argument than the newspapers had been able to provide (p. 14).

With this switch, newspapers (and many magazines) began providing a variety of viewpoints and stepped away from blatant political ties. These are the historical papers that, theoretically, most closely resemble the newspapers of today's mainstream media. Mindich (1998) wrote, "For one, unlike the party or mercantile press, the pennies were not supported by political parties, and the articles were more likely to cover news outside the narrow political and mercantile interests of the six-centers" (p. 17). This change dropped the price a couple of notches on the cent scale and branched out to include the more average American reader. With this transition, newspaper reporters and editors cut ties with the political parties and started attempting what can be deemed objective reporting. According to Mindich (1998), objectivity has five components: detachment, nonpartisanship, the inverted-pyramid writing style, facticity and balance. These components provide the basis for today's mainstream media.

As with many concepts, views of objectivity differ markedly. Stephen J.A. Ward (2006) argues that objectivity in its most basic definition, such as Mindich's above, is impossible. He provides an alternative concept, pragmatic objectivity, that considers problems with the original definition of objectivity and more realistic guidelines for journalists. The framework stresses imperfection and allows for skepticism in reporting, but it insists that writers must refrain from partiality and inserting tone into their work.

The two latter elements regarding opinion and tone make Ward's concept especially noteworthy, including his elaboration on what pragmatic objectivity entails.

According to Ward (2006): "Pragmatic objectivity ascribes to a fallibilistic theory of truth. Our truths are not only plural; they are fallible. There is no guarantee that our most fundamental and seemingly secure beliefs will not need revision" (p. 268). Ward (2006) also presents three standards to gauge the objectivity of a claim. "There are *empirical standards,* which test a belief's agreement with the world; *standards of coherence,* which evaluate how consistent a belief is with the rest of what we believe; and *standards of rational debate,* which test how fair we have been in representing the claims of others and in opening up our claims to the scrutiny of others" (p. 283). These three standards were analyzed to apply specifically to journalism. Ward (2006) asserts that journalistic objectivity can be refashioned to include pragmatic objectivity because the core features of the theory exist in objective journalism, current procedures for testing objectivity can be reinterpreted, and pragmatic objectivity is a conceptual option that stresses responsible journalism (p. 288). With these theoretical standards in place, pragmatic objectivity is taken further into practical, everyday application.

The concept of pragmatic objectivity directly defined in the context of journalism is "the epistemic evaluation of truth-seeking inquiry in journalism. It guides the difficult search for verified truths, and it restrains partiality" (Ward, 2006, p. 297). Pragmatic objectivity applied within the field is also divided into two levels: the general requirements of objectivity and journalistic standards (Ward, 2006, p. 298). This combines the three philosophical standards from above with modern journalistic practice, stating, "pragmatic objectivity in journalism is a holistic, fallible, rational evaluation of

reports. A report is objective to the degree that it derives from an objective stance and satisfies the two levels of standards — those generic to inquiry and those specific to journalism practice" (Ward, 2006, p. 300). According to Ward (2006), journalists currently view information with a healthy dose of skepticism and let integrity guide their work (p. 298). But pragmatic objectivity also carries journalists past general fact gathering into all other aspects of reporting. According to Ward (2006), "journalists display their objectivity by their professional attitude, the carefulness of their reporting, and the restrained tone of their reports" (p. 298). It is this definition of pragmatic objectivity coupled with the ideas of avoiding partiality that is necessary for the purpose of this study with special emphasis placed on the notion of restrained tone in stories.

Point of View as Explanatory Journalism

Some might argue that point of view directly challenges this idea of restrained tone. As objectivity became less attainable and beat reporters were sent out in pursuit of truth, magazines tried a different approach — interpretive reporting (Ward 2006). This style of writing doesn't distinguish between objective and subjective. It explains the issue at hand while incorporating literary techniques such as anecdote, metaphor and quotes. Henry Luce of *Time* was a vocal critic of attempts at objectivity and lauded this technique of interpretation and explanation in magazines (Ward 2006). According to Ward (2006), "interpretive journalism freed editors from both partisan politics and neutrality" (p. 235). He called this mixture of fact and interpretation explanatory journalism. Ward (2006) writes: "*Time's* style of interpretation often sounded objective and authoritative, not subjective. Good editing gave *Time* an all-knowing, detached tone" (p. 235).

Magazines such as *The New Yorker* followed *Time's* early 1920s lead, but it wasn't until the 1950s that other mainstream editors started questioning objectivity during a time when it was practiced the most. According to Ward (2006), "Pure objectivity in journalism became an impure objectivity, allowing more interpretation and judgment" (p. 237). This general framework developed by *Time* and replicated by other publications has helped develop the literary style of magazines nationwide today. There is an element of tone, voice and overall explanation in pieces that is often absent in other forms of print media. "*Time's* non-objective style, which borrowed literary techniques from Homer and other august sources, was condensed but not dry" (Ward, 2006, p. 235). This often subjective literary style has grown over the years into an industry-wide term called point of view, which is media jargon used to describe how magazine writers and editors employ interpretive journalism through text and underlying voice. Rarely, columns aside, do magazine writers explicitly express an opinion. First-person narrative still remains far from commonplace, but underlying point of view is often present. Interpretation and point of view, however, are still not accepted by all. According to Johnson and Prijatel (2007): "Many journalists are still uncertain about the place of interpretation in a field heralded for its objectivity. Interpretation, however, helps readers make sense of a complex world" (p. 137). Some editors passionately agree.

In the March 3, 2008, issue of *Time,* Managing Editor Richard Stengel penned his To Our Reader's column, "Taking Sides," about newspaper endorsements and the underlying difference between magazines and newspapers. He argued that newspapers compromise credibility when publishing opinion in the form of endorsements. "It's certainly the prerogative of newspapers and their owners to endorse candidates, but in

doing so they are undermining the very basis for their business, which is impartiality. It's a recipe for having less influence, not more," Stengel writes. One of Stengel's main points is that individuals who are younger than 30 years old are often befuddled by the newspaper industry when it stresses objectivity but prints endorsements. He says readers question transparency and become skeptical of news reports. Essentially, the younger demographic, or anyone for that matter, doesn't want to be told how to vote. According to Stengel, magazines, however, can benefit from a published point of view in articles, and he encourages writers to take one. "I want our writers to express a point of view in their stories," he writes. "They're experts, they've done their homework, and I think it's fair for writers to suggest that after thoroughly reviewing the candidates' policies on health care, they find one more practical than another. That's transparency."

Stengel's discussion of newspaper endorsements isn't the only time he has publicly discussed taking a point of view. On April 17, 2008, Stengel appeared on MSNBC's *Morning Joe* to talk about *Time*'s upcoming cover story. The issue, published April 28, 2008, carried a green border and an altered illustration of the classic Iwo Jima image. On *Time*'s cover, the black-and-white soldiers are raising a bright-green tree. Stengel defended the use of the image and the magazine's advocacy stance, saying:

> One of the things that's needed in journalism is that you have to have a point of view about things. You can't always just say, "on the one hand, on the other," and then you decide. People trust us to make decisions. We're experts in what we do. So I thought, you know what, if we really feel strongly about something, let's just say so. And we've done that a number of times since I've been back.

Stengel also said that readers have come to expect a point of view from the magazine. Stengel's anecdotal explanations coupled with Ward's explanatory journalism define point of view. But understanding why point of view is used in magazines is still unclear.

Magazines as Community Builders

Magazines have historically developed communities among readers, and many would argue that they develop them well. Referencing the late 1800s, Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991) write: "With the firm establishment of magazines as a national reading habit, reaching a rapidly increasing number of audiences, the industry as a whole began to be a multifaceted reflection of national life. In the periodicals could be found the opinions, attitudes, emotions, preoccupations, and interests of most Americans" (p. 73). Much of this reflection comes through identifying audiences. According to Johnson and Prijatel (2007), "Before a magazine is even published, the editors have to define the way in which the magazine's content is geared to the needs, interests, and motivations of its audience" (p. 150). An audience of select individuals with similar interests can form into a fully functioning imagined community. Carolyn Kitch (2005) writes that participating in a constant conversation with readers helps build the community. "Media narratives are indeed dialogic: that is, although the stories are 'told' by journalists, the story types at least partly come from and return to the audience" (Kitch, 2005, p. 4). Dialogue aids in building and strengthening specialized communities that contain readers and editors with particular interests. According to Johnson and Prijatel (2007), "In many cases, the editor *is* the reader, and the magazine is aimed at the editor's tastes, which nicely mesh with the tastes of the larger audience" (p. 150). The types of readers and community will also

dictate the way in which material is presented. Often, for example, writing is informal. According to Kitch (2005):

> Readers' loyalty to this medium is further strengthened by the editorial language magazines use. Their editors and writers address readers in a conversational way, anticipating their reactions and incorporating their impressions, especially in summary issues. A reflexive and inclusive style is apparent on the editor's page, where, often, the staff is pictured and readers are given an explanation of the content (p. 9).

Kitch also notes the use of the word *we* to connect magazine staffers with the audience. This adds to the establishment of tone, voice and point of view in publications. "In these ways, magazines can be seen as the most dialogic of all journalistic media" (Kitch, 2005, p. 9).

When magazines appeal to a certain category of individuals with dialogue, specialized messages, content and points of view, they run the risk of sacrificing the most highly regarded journalistic ideal — objectivity. Some, however, believe that all good magazine articles carry a point of view. Johnson and Prijatel (2007) write, "Because their communities of readers are so well defined and close-knit, magazines are far more comfortable than any other medium in providing opinion and interpretation, and in advocating for the causes of their audiences" (p. 10). With these opinion, interpretation and advocacy components, the notion of point of view emerges. This can involve liberties that editors and writers take at magazines to connect with their readers and provide a unified outlook for the publication. Johnson and Prijatel (2007) allege that growth in the magazine world in recent years can largely be attributed to the rise in magazines specializing in advocacy.

At the simplest level, point of view can be considered a form of advocacy. It's not as blunt or direct as a magazine devoted specifically to a cause, but it provides interpretation and pushes an underlying belief. This technique of interpretation is found in literary journalism published both in magazines and book form, and this type of narrative writing often includes a point of view. Hartsock (2000) defines narrative literary journalism as "true-life stories that read like a novel or short story" (p. 22). This type of writing dates back to the earliest magazines, was called New Journalism in the 1960s and exists today under similar monikers. But to limit the study of point of view to literary journalism leaves out niche publications that also advance points of view in shorter, less narrative pieces. For example, women's and men's magazines do not always publish long-form literary pieces that are more common in *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*, but a point of view is still put forth in these publications. Overarching points of view in publications often surface in mission statements.

Mission statements, which are also known as editorial philosophies, are viewed as goals for publications (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007, p. 135). Johnson and Prijatel (2007) write, "An editorial philosophy explains what the magazine is intended to do, what areas of interest it covers, how it will approach those interests, and the voice it will use to express itself" (p. 135). These punchy and small groupings of sentences also provide insight into the way the editors and writers at the publication view their readers. According to Johnson and Prijatel (2007), "Essential to the philosophy is an understanding of the magazine's target audience" (p. 136). Understanding a magazine's target demographic can aid in understanding the publication's desired point of view. These mission statements envision an audience and an imagined dialogue with a reader,

which includes a desired voice. Johnson and Prijatel (2007) write that voice provides readers with consistency and imagination. “A magazine’s identity is most easily defined by its voice—that is, the tone and tenor of articles and graphics” (Johnson & Prijatel, 2007, p. 143).

Esquire, for example, is “geared toward men who have arrived.” *Rolling Stone* magazine is “a cultural icon. It’s the original—and it’s still the number one pop culture reference point for young adults.” *Vanity Fair* “is a cultural catalyst—a magazine that provokes and drives the popular dialogue.” *The New Yorker* is “a collection of intelligent, funny, and penetrating voices. It is also a collection of deeply distinctive approaches, senses of humor, levels of reporting, and ways of looking at life.” From broad and all-encompassing to direct and individualistic, mission statements provide a window to which points of view can become clearer and also help in understanding frames that dominate publications.

Framing to Advance Points of View

Media theories such as framing encompass both conscious and unconscious decisions editors and writers make in the journalistic world. Framing can be blunt or indirect and helpful or harmful to readers. The theory behind the practice brings in a variety of decisions that are often considered unconscious but potentially dangerous. People frame everyday events to advance understanding and organizational capabilities. In framing, the media “aim at least to influence, condition, and reproduce the activity of audiences by reaching into the symbolic organization of thought” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 14). According to Gitlin (1980), apart from direct experience, frames are the utilities that

naturalize everyday events for the average citizen. Gitlin (1980) writes, "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 6). This definition puts power in the hands of editors and writers and presents frames as unavoidable measures that keep the practice of information presentation successful. It's these types of basic framing techniques that theorists believe aid in general understanding.

At the more fundamental level of presentation, frames involve salience and selection and are powerful ways to understand text. Entman (1993) writes, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). According to Entman (1993):

> Frames, then, *define problems*—determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measure in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes*—identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments*—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies*—offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects (p. 52).

These four functions, in particular, make information easier to understand and have the ability to turn text into a powerful persuasive tool. In using these functions, framing is advanced consistently in journalistic practice.

More specifically, however, "frames highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of communication, thereby elevating them in salience" (p. 53). Entman (1993) defines salience as making one piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable than another. According to Entman (1993), frames are also

separated into four parts of the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture. The communicator is the point of emphasis here. "*Communicators* make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize the belief systems" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The journalistic communicators are writers and editors and for the purpose of this study, magazine writers and editors specifically.

According to Entman (1993), the theoretical concept of framing can be used to study journalistic objectivity because the results of actions on the part of communicators are transparent and available for analysis. According to Entman (1993), "Journalists may follow the rules for 'objective' reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the news text that prevents most audience members from making a balanced assessment of a situation" (p. 56). This, Entman says, is due to a lack of knowledge when it comes to framing on the part of the journalist. Entman (1993) writes, "If educated to understand the difference between including scattered oppositional facts and challenging a dominant frame, journalists might be better equipped to construct news that makes equally salient—equally accessible to the average, inattentive, and marginally informed audience—two or more interpretations of problems" (p. 57). This mindset reemphasizes the problem with providing both sides of the story in that both sides might not logically deserve equal placement and coverage.

Entman's later work expands on these issues with a slightly altered definition of framing, which is more specific to the current media climate and magazine-style journalism. According to Entman (2007), "We can define *framing* as the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights

connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (p. 164). He combines this later, more interpretive definition of framing with the theoretical concepts of agenda setting and priming, ultimately connecting all three to bias. Agenda setting is defined as focusing on issues that should be reported to the public. Priming triggers an understanding and response to the issue of declared importance. "That is, frames introduce or raise the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way" (Entman, 2007, p. 164). Other theorists have extrapolated further on the combination of these concepts and the more interpretive mindset.

In 2000, Dietram Scheufele argued that all three concepts should remain separate because of dissimilar premises, but he acknowledged basic connections and also emphasized an interpretive element within framing. According to Scheufele (2000), frames influence opinions by playing on particular values and facts. But Scheufele (2000) writes that attribution, "a macroscopic approach to framing that examines media frames as outcomes of journalistic norms or organizational constraints," is the main theoretical premise of framing (Scheufele, 2000, p. 299). Frames are ways for journalists to approach stories and ways for audiences to comprehend them. According to Scheufele (2000), framing is based within small changes in word choice and syntax that affect how readers interpret a situation. "In other words, framing influences how audiences think about issues, not by making aspects of the issue more salient, but by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information" (Scheufele, 2000, p. 309).

Although Entman and Scheufele are on opposite sides of the agenda setting, priming and framing debate, they are both stressing a change from basic salience to a more interpretive stance. With Entman's switch to a much closer connection of the concepts, he advanced analysis that highlights issues with their use such as bias. These are issues Scheufele touches on when mentioning the way in which journalists utilize framing. Scheufele (2000) writes that previous research shows that at least five factors influence how journalists frame. These factors are social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalistic routines and ideological or political orientations of journalists. All of these factors contribute to bias. Entman (2007) writes, "The media's decision biases operate within the minds of individual journalists and within the processes of journalistic institutions, embodied in (generally unstated) rules and norms that guide their processing of information and influence the framing of media texts" (p. 166). By understanding the processes within the magazine industry and the guidelines that run it, point of view will eventually emerge, especially when viewing accepted biases and frames.

Entman's (2007) definition of framing that focuses on presenting one particular interpretation coupled with the earlier emphasis on selection forms the definition for the purpose of this study. The practice of selection is essential to understanding the concept of point of view when information included is carefully chosen to reach a desired overall statement. The narrative elements, including point of view, that push forward an established interpretation are also important for understanding the magazine world and the process of long-form narrative journalism. For the purpose of this study, framing is

understood as the selection and presentation of certain facts over others to promote a desired interpretation.

Previous Research

Studies have approached framing in both quantitative and qualitative ways with the unit of study being the individual story. In 2000, Reichert, Mueller and Nitz (2003) studied political coverage in five popular consumer magazines during the presidential election. Choosing magazines popular with young adults, Reichert, Mueller and Nitz (2003) sought to gauge political-content consumption among young adults. In "Disengaged and Uninformed: 2000 Presidential Election Coverage in Consumer Magazines Popular with Young Adults," Reichert, Mueller and Nitz (2003) write that magazines are the best medium to analyze because the opinions expressed in articles would likely reflect the opinions of the audience. Working with the ideas of community and audience reflection expressed by Johnson and Prijatel (2007), the authors believed the "editorial persona" was found in the voice of the publication.

For the study, Reichert, Mueller and Nitz tracked the quantity of content and analyzed framing techniques in the text of articles in *Rolling Stone, Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Esquire and Maxim*. In their study, *Rolling Stone* was considered more of a general-interest magazine that focused on political coverage. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most political information was found in *Rolling Stone*. To account for these differences in publication purposes and show the unique goals among them, the researchers highlighted mission statements to describe the audiences. When analyzing all of the coverage, they found that articles largely used two frames: policy and strategy. Most instances of

coverage were analytical with 76 percent of all coverage falling into the strategy frame. The articles in the men's magazines utilized a cynical tone in all but two instances, which differed markedly from coverage in women's magazines, which rarely employed such a tone and were more pro-involvement in their messages. Coverage in men's magazines was cynical 65 percent of the time compared to 7 percent in women's magazine. An overall liberal bias was noted in all of the publications. According to Reichert, Mueller and Nitz (2003), "The tone of the coverage may have been inconsistent among the magazines sampled, but there was a consistent bias favoring Gore over Bush" (p. 523). The analysis of tone in this study coupled with framing techniques can speak directly to point of view in magazines. Combining these two concepts is the goal of this study.

In DeSantis' and Morgan's (2003) study of *Cigar Aficionado,* the authors detailed frames utilized and techniques employed to justify the smoking of cigars in a society that largely rallies against the use of tobacco-related products. This study published in *Health Communication* shows how a specific community of often upper-class cigar smokers in America is targeted with pro-smoking messages that highlight health "benefits" such as stress relief. With these framing techniques and persuasive messages, DeSantis and Morgan (2003) assert that the magazine has directly aided in the growth of the cigar-smoking community. DeSantis and Morgan (2003) call these persuasive techniques arguments and assert that *Cigar Aficionado* used more than 380 of them. The pro-smoking arguments utilize a variety of tones, including a cynical one that trivializes research conducted within the medical community about the negative health effects of cigar smoking. Positive tone, however, is also used in messages that promote stress relief. These differences in tone combined with the promotion of a desired message and

interpretation could also be considered the blatant employment of point of view. Although much more blunt than most respectable literary journalism pieces might be, this is the technique employed to an advocacy extreme.

Although all of these studies focused on the theoretical framework of framing, none sought to understand the building of frames at the publication and the establishment of point of view. In Chew, Mandelbaum-Schmid and Gao's (2006) study titled, "Can Health Journalists Bridge the State-of-the-Science Gap in Mammography Guidelines?" a triangulation of methods were used, including interviewing. Apart from analyzing data from the National Cancer Institute to compare to a previously conducted content analysis, the researchers interviewed two magazine editors and six health writers. Interviewers sought to understand the process of publishing stories about mammography studies. They found that though knowledgeable on the subject matter, writers would often avoid confrontation with editors in terms of what should be published. Editors felt pressured, in part by readers, to produce certain types of content, especially content that was positive about mammograms. This study provides insight into the interviewing method and the way writers and editors speak about their process. It also shows the extent to which writers and editors care about maintaining their communities of readers through tone whether it be positive, negative or cynical. Some could argue that this overarching desire was to the detriment of the publication's writers, editors and readers because content produced was sacrificed to a certain degree. Research interviews, however, were only 20 to 30 minutes long, which doesn't allow for great depth in responses and further questioning on perceived effects on their communities of readers.

An unpublished master's thesis by Dong Wang (2005) titled, "Editorial Practices of Top Editors of Ten Magazines: An Explorative Study on Magazine Editing" takes the method of interviewing a step further. Wang studied how higher-ups at magazines edit content based on their respective positions. For this study, Wang conducted in-depth interviews and accessed rich data from those she interviewed. It is this type of method that adapted best for this study.

Research Question

How and why do U.S. consumer magazine writers and editors establish point of view in their publications?

Chapter III

Methodology

The research question, "How and why do U.S. magazine writers and editors establish point of view in their publications?" was posed to 11 magazine professionals, including writers and editors representing 10 magazines. The concept of point of view in magazines has not been directly studied, which opens up several options for examination. Approaching the research qualitatively produced the richest data. According to Christians and Carey (1989), qualitative methods aim to interpret and uncover meaning through four phases: naturalistic observation, contextualization, maximized comparisons and sensitized concepts. Every method and study will not encompass all four of these phases, but solid work will touch on at least one. The same can be said of the traditionally qualitative methods.

For this study, it was necessary to begin at the most basic level by understanding the motivations behind establishing and executing a point of view. This will eventually provide a launching point for further research. The unit of analysis was individual interviews that highlighted personal and professional motivations and beliefs. Interviewing is a multi-faceted qualitative method that was likely established in ancient times but was reformed in the 1880s with social-survey research (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p.362). Interviewing today is varied. According to Fontana and Frey (1994), "Interviewing found great popularity and widespread use in clinical diagnosis and counseling, where the concern was on the quality of the response, and later, during World

War I, interviewing came to be widely employed in psychological testing, with an emphasis on measurement" (p. 362). Now this historical approach has transformed further into a qualitative research method.

Interviewing as a means of research can be viewed at a variety of levels, including structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews follow a prescribed approach by determining in advance the number of questions and the specific wording of each question. In performing structured interviews, no deviation can occur in the format of the questions, which includes the order in which they are asked, or the word choice. Interviewers cannot respond, reword or explain questions in greater depth. This approach allows for comparison among respondents and data that is easier to analyze and seemingly untainted by the interviewer's presence. Semi-structured interviews are more characteristic of journalistic practice. They begin with predetermined questions but deviate based on what is said in the interview. This is where follow-up questions are of great importance. Unstructured interviews incorporate traits from semi-structured interviews, such as follow-up questions, but expand on the method to allow for deeper thinking and extended conversation.

Unstructured, in-depth interviews allow for conversational techniques that typically require a greater amount of time than the previously described types. Many tend to last more than an hour but can go on for days, according to Fontana and Frey (1994). This increased timeframe is often necessary to get at the root of what is being studied. Berger (1998) classifies in-depth interviews as extended conversations that are highly focused to eventually unearth beliefs or feelings. He writes, "The reason such interviews can take so much time is that it is often necessary to penetrate the defenses people put up

to prevent their hidden beliefs from coming to light – defenses that they frequently are not conscious of and do not recognize in their behavior" (p. 55). The ability to pry beneath surface-level answers about a technique that might never be openly discussed in the interviewee's workplace took time. In-depth interviews allowed for this time, which was necessary to bring down defenses and bring out underlying beliefs. The study also adapted individually to each situation, each interviewee and the subject matter of each conversation. No two conversations followed the exact path, but each ultimately uncovered the answers necessary for further analysis.

There are noted advantages and disadvantages to unstructured interviewing, but disadvantages, such as an interviewee's resistance to talk and the conversation going wildly off topic, were avoided in this study. All interviewees were informed of the study in advance and in detail. The interviews were conducted in locations that the interviewees were most comfortable in. An interview guide with specific questions was also consulted during all interviews in an effort to maintain consistency among the conversations. One of the major advantages to conducting in-depth interviews is the breadth of information interview subjects can supply. Unexpected information can often be brought up in an interview (Berger, 1998, p. 57). Berger writes, "The more people talk, the more they reveal (give away) about themselves" (p. 57). And a good interviewer can guide the discussion in any way he or she needs to obtain specific data for analysis. The problems that Berger (1998) notes with in-depth interviews have a lot to do with the respondents and their willingness to talk. He points out that many people have difficulty explaining *why* they do certain things. One asset of journalists, however, is that they are used to talking, and those who are practicing long-form narrative are undoubtedly accustomed to

analyzing situations and actions. By agreeing to participate, they understood the concept and believed they had something to contribute. In the preface of *Editors on Editing,* Gerald Gross (1985) writes that though certain editors declined to write for the second edition because of time or the inability to describe what their job entails, several others took on the task. In the 1993 revised preface, Gross writes, "These top professionals write with insight and candor about the special demands and skills necessary to their particular areas of editorial expertise" (p. xiv). If editors and writers are passionate about the subject matter, they will talk. And according to Gross (1993), they will do so in an extraordinarily eloquent manner. Unstructured interviewing can bring out these types of responses.

Unstructured interviewing is also inherently qualitative with ethnographic roots. Although participant observation could eventually prove enlightening in terms of examining point of view, much of this construction can be assumed to take place in the minds of the editors and the writers rather than in an open dialogue in a magazine office or newsroom. This is likely the case in that point of view is rarely discussed in academia and scholarly work. The solid comparison to make is between point of view and framing. Framing is often a subconscious device employed by journalists to help media consumers understand the information they are given. Point of view arguably takes this act of writers constructing frames to a more conscious level, but the way in which it is executed can also be unconscious in the writing process. Ideally, however, the established point of view will guide readers in the development of their own opinions about a certain topic or event.

With this understanding of point of view, the device qualifies as a concept or phenomenon, which is typical of the tradition of phenomenology. In phenomenological studies, the meaning of lived experiences of certain individuals is analyzed in relation to a certain concept (Creswell, 1998, p. 50). Creswell (1998) writes, "This translates into an approach to studying the problem that includes entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon; and looking for the meaning of the participants' experiences" (p. 31). In this case, the concept is point of view and the people interviewed were magazine writers and editors. Meeting in person provided a more direct glimpse into their journalistic lives.

In conducting this study, 11 journalists representing 10 consumer magazines were interviewed using unstructured techniques in the phenomenological tradition. The interviews were conducted between January 14, 2009, and March 11, 2009, and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. All but two interviews were conducted in person where nonverbal cues were noted and the locale was comfortable for the interviewee. The other two interviews were conducted over the phone due to scheduling constraints and conflicts. In using the concept of point of view and the theories of pragmatic objectivity and framing, much of the information gathered was separated into categories to describe point of view. For the purpose of this study, the magazine world was also separated into five categories based on target audience, reach and varied points of view. The categories are high-end general-interest, which includes magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and *The Atlantic*. The second category consists of national news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. The third category encompasses city and regional magazines such as *The Washingtonian* magazine and *New York Magazine*. The fourth category holds

niche publications such as *ESPN The Magazine* and *Rolling Stone*. And the last category has men's and women's magazines such as *Esquire* and *Glamour*. In all instances, except high-end general-interest, two people were interviewed from each of these categories. Three journalists were interviewed in the high-end general-interest category. In some instances, both journalists in a category work for the same publication, but everyone who was interviewed has experiences from other publications that help guide their beliefs on the subject. The end goal was to interview writers and editors who could best speak to the subject matter and who work at magazines within the commercial realm that have varied target demographics and missions.

All interview subjects are named in this study, and all interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to find patterns among respondents. All transcripts were initially compared individually. By then grouping editors and writers together who work for magazines that fit into the defined categories, answers were compared to one another's and then to the other groups. With this method of analysis, patterns at both the individual and group level formed. Key words were also identified when it came to explicating the concept of point of view in the words of practicing journalists. For the purpose of this study, determining patterns and understanding the opinions that surround the technique were crucial. A list of the interviewees is provided here as well as brief descriptions of the individuals' varied backgrounds in journalism.

High-End General-Interest Publications

Lauren Collins is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. She started as an editorial assistant at *Vogue*, moved to an editorial assistant position at *The New Yorker*, moved up to assistant editor, then deputy editor for "Talk of the Town" and then to staff writer. She has written pieces about Donatella Versace, Banksy and Michelle Obama.

Todd Purdum is *Vanity Fair's* national editor. Before starting at *Vanity Fair* in 2006, he spent 23 years in various positions at *The New York Times*. As a junior at Princeton University, he started stringing for the *Times* and went to work as a copyboy after graduation. He held numerous jobs, including clerk, reporter trainee, metro desk reporter, city hall bureau chief and chief metropolitan global correspondent. In 1993, Purdum moved to Washington, D.C., to cover the regional delegation of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut for the *Times*. After a year, he switched to covering the Clinton White House, and in 1997, he became the Los Angeles bureau chief. He returned to Washington in 2001 to cover a variety of topics, including the 2004 campaign. In 2006, Purdum made the jump to magazine writing and, specifically, *Vanity Fair*.

Scott Stossel is deputy editor of *The Atlantic*. Stossel started his journalism career by writing for a number of publications while at Harvard University. After graduating in 1991, he spent a year freelancing before interning at *The Atlantic*. The internship led to a job, and he stayed for four years in a variety of positions, including staff editor. He also helped launch the Web site. Stossel then left for six years and worked at *The American Prospect* as executive editor. He wrote a book, *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent*

Shriver, and returned to *The Atlantic* in 2002 as senior editor, which turned into managing editor and, after a title change, deputy editor.

Newsweeklies

Richard Stengel is managing editor of *Time* magazine. He graduated from Princeton University in 1977 after taking a course taught by John McPhee that inspired him to become a journalist. After attending the University of Oxford for graduate school, McPhee got Stengel an interview at *Time,* where he started working in his early 20s. He has worked at *Time* in several stints and has held numerous positions, including staff writer, senior writer, senior editor, assistant managing editor, Time.com editor and managing editor. He became managing editor in 2006. Stengel has also written for *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic* and *The New York Times*.

David Von Drehle is editor-at-large for *Time* magazine. His journalism career began in high school, where he was the editor of the newspaper. He also worked for the *Denver Post* in high school and continued his sports writing gig at the newspaper while he attended college at the University of Denver. After college, he eventually headed to the *Miami Herald* where he was the New York correspondent until the position was eliminated. He was hired at *The Washington Post* as the New York bureau chief, which turned into a job as a national reporter and, ultimately, an editing job. He spent 15 years at the *Post* before leaving for *Time* two and a half years ago.

City and Regional Magazines

Garrett Graff became executive editor of *The Washingtonian* in April 2009. At the time of his interview, he was editor-at-large of the magazine. Graff comes from a family of journalists but started his post-Harvard career in politics as Howard Dean's deputy national spokesperson during his presidential campaign. When that came to an untimely end, he co-founded EchoDitto, an Internet strategy firm, and focused on blogging and social media. As founding editor of Mediabistro's Fishbowl DC, Graff covered media and journalism. Success with Fishbowl DC got him a freelance gig at *Washingtonian*, and in 2005, he accepted the position of editor-at-large. He also runs the Internet division of the publication.

Vanessa Grigoriadis is a contributing editor for *New York Magazine, Rolling Stone* and *Vanity Fair*. She started her career as an editorial assistant at *New York* in 1995, which led to the contributing editor job in 1998. She has worked at the "Style" section of *The New York Times,* has freelanced for a variety of publications and has been with *Rolling Stone* for five years. She recently signed a contract with *Vanity Fair*. In 2007, Grigoriadis won a National Magazine Award in profile writing for a piece on Karl Lagerfeld that was published in *New York*.

Niche Publications

John Byrne is executive editor of *BusinessWeek* and editor-in-chief of BusinessWeek.com. He attended graduate school at the University of Missouri and earned a M.A. in journalism before starting his journalism career with Fairchild

Publications in Washington, D.C. He worked with the trade newspaper group for two and a half years in D.C., became London bureau chief for another two and a half years and took a writing job with *Forbes*. Byrne was then recruited by *BusinessWeek* and took on the job of management editor. After 17 and a half years in the position, he was hired as the editor-in-chief of *Fast Company*. Two and a half years later, he was invited back to *BusinessWeek* as executive editor.

Justin Heckert is a contributing writer for *ESPN The Magazine*. He earned a bachelor's in journalism from the University of Missouri, where he held internships at the *Southeast Missourian, Los Angeles Times* and *ESPN The Magazine*. After graduating in 2002, he took a writing job with *Atlanta Magazine*. After his first year at *Atlanta Magazine,* Heckert won writer of the year in the City and Regional Magazine Association awards competition. After another year with *Atlanta,* Heckert left for the contributing writer job with *ESPN*. He has also written for *Esquire* and *Men's Journal*.

Men's and Women's Magazines

Tom Junod is writer-at-large for *Esquire*. His first job out of college was selling handbags. His first journalism job was writing small profiles for an insurance company's newsletter, which led to a job at a trade magazine and, eventually, *Atlanta Magazine*. He started writing freelance pieces in 1984 and was hired full time in 1987. He stayed at *Atlanta* for two and a half years, got a National Magazine Award nomination and moved on to a magazine called *Southpoint*. When that folded a short time later, he was offered a dual contract at *Life* and *Sports Illustrated*. Citing difficulties with *Sports Illustrated,*

Junod started writing for *GQ* with editor David Granger. Junod won two National Magazine Awards with *GQ,* and when Granger moved to *Esquire,* Junod followed. He was a finalist for a 2009 National Magazine Award for a piece on Steve Jobs.

David Katz is a contributing editor for *Esquire*. He started his journalism career working for the newspaper at the University of California, Berkeley. Post college, he took a job at *Wired* in San Francisco before moving to New York to work at *Vanity Fair* as a fact checker and for Tina Brown's *Talk* magazine as a junior editor. He then took a job as features editor for *Time Out New York* before transferring to *Esquire*, where he was an associate editor for five and a half years, an articles editor and now a contributing editor. He specializes in humor essays.

Chapter IV

Explaining Point of View

There is no standard definition of point of view among magazine editors and writers, but there are several components and characteristics generally understood to be tucked under the wide-reaching umbrella of the term. Despite the myths of a largely liberal press, opinions are as varied among journalists as their takes on the points of view they bring to their stories and the way they define the concept. According to the 11 magazine staffers interviewed for this study, point of view is a framing technique that incorporates perspective, judgment, voice and explanatory journalism to effectively tell a story. It's modern but not new, personal but not over-indulgent, subjective but truthful. And it's everywhere.

George Orwell once said that good prose is like a windowpane. "If you think about what is a windowpane, well, it's clear; you can see through it; you can see what's on the other side," says *Time* magazine's Editor-at-Large David Von Drehle. "But it is also a frame. A windowpane, while it's showing you something, it's not showing you everything. It's choosing in a way. It's framing what you see, but it's not obscuring what it's trying to show you. To me, that's a great definition of a goal." And that goal is one characteristic of point of view. *BusinessWeek* Executive Editor John Byrne says more bluntly of point of view, "I would say that it is an essential piece of framing your journalism for an audience." The large, theoretical construct of framing is the starting point for all point of viewed work and, more broadly, all journalistic work. These

"principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation" encompass the most basic of journalistic principles (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). They manifest themselves in what information is chosen for the lead, what encompasses the nut graph, which quotes make it into the piece and what the powerful last statement will be. In total, framing is a journalist's key to presenting interpretation.

In pulling out specific defining characteristics, *The New Yorker* Staff Writer Lauren Collins describes point of view as the perspective from which a story is told. *The Atlantic* Deputy Editor Scott Stossel agrees. "I don't think a lot about it explicitly in terms of point of view," he says. "I think about it more as voice and perspective, which is largely the same thing. It's kind of the angle of approach of a story." For *Esquire* Contributing Editor David Katz, it's tonal. "I think it's your authorial intent," Katz says. For *Time* Editor-at-Large David Von Drehle, it's similar. "To me, point of view is a better word for authorial voice," he says. For *ESPN The Magazine* Contributing Writer Justin Heckert, point of view encompasses voice, but it's also about an experience, and how that experience makes its way to the glossy pages of a magazine. "Point of view is about voice, and it is about the writer obviously, but I think point of view is also just not being afraid to write about what you really saw and present a person or a situation," Heckert says. "This obviously just doesn't have to do with people you're profiling. It's sights and smells and how something felt. It's style and voice. It's hard to explain unless you're sitting there feeling it and writing it. It changes from story to story."

And for *Time* Managing Editor Richard Stengel, the outspoken voice of the movement, it's simply a modern way of doing journalism and something that people and publications have gradually been moving toward. "To me, what I want is something that

combines the old-fashioned here's a summary of the different points of view with a modern OK, I've explained these to you; I've summarized them to you; now I'm going to evaluate their merit or their weight," he says. "And then I'm going to come to a conclusion." Like Stengel has said in television appearances, written in editor's letters and emphasized in the interview for this study, in the process of reporting, writers become mini-experts on a topic. In other instances, his writers are truly experts on a topic. Taking into account the expertise of his writers, he encourages them to take a point of view if they have one. "To me, what I want as a reader and an editor is the benefit of their knowledge and wisdom and point of view," Stengel says. "I mean that is doing a real service as opposed to the other way where you're not taking a point of view about it."

Point of View is Personal

For *Esquire* Writer-at-Large Tom Junod, point of view is fundamentally personal. "To me, point of view is making the story as personal as you can," he says. "I'm not saying write it in the first person. I'm not saying write it about yourself. I'm saying that you somehow locate what interests you about the story and what turns you on about the story, and make sure that that's actually in the story that you tell or at least shapes it." For Junod, one of the most personal stories he wrote never mentioned the connection. In 1994, he penned a piece for then-employer *GQ* called "The Abortionist." The powerful story about an abortion doctor won a National Magazine Award and was emotionally intense for Junod to write. "The thing about that story was that I wrote that at a time when my wife and I were really, really trying to have a baby and not succeeding," he says. "There's not a single line or inkling or nothing in that story that would indicate that,

and yet that was the driving force behind that story." Junod held no punches, writing in the style of Joseph Mitchell, and in a way that he says he hasn't written since. "I was kind of chopping wood in that thing. And I don't know exactly what I was chopping at, but I was chopping wood in some way. Every sentence was an ax, and I was swinging. That's what I mean by point of view. I mean that something creeps into the work that is very much at the heart of yourself, and you allow that to happen." Doing it any other way but in an immensely personal one feels unnatural to Junod.

Katz, also of *Esquire,* follows a similar path but opts for first-person humor accounts that are nothing but personal. There's a significant difference between a heavily reported 10,000-word piece and a first-person, immersion-style humor essay. But there's point of view in both, and both styles are more experimental instances of point-of-viewed work. In many ways, it doesn't get more personal than strutting through New York in a three-piece suit complete with capris while surviving the process to write about it. "The point of view is that of a fish-out-of-water type of thing," he says, adding that the immersion journalism involved is almost that of a stunt. At the time of the interview, Katz was working on two features: one about being a short-order cook and another about trying to sell BMWs. "But both of those things are all about my experiences, a little bit self-indulgent. I guess the point of view could be obnoxious, but you know it's kind of how you do it. Those are all point of view. There's nothing newsy or inherently interesting about those stories."

Heckert wrote for *Atlanta Magazine* for two years before starting his contributing writer gig at *ESPN The Magazine*. He found that in writing features for *Atlanta* and, ultimately for *ESPN,* that the process became a very personal one. One of his recent

pieces for *ESPN* centered on a sports super fan in Oxford, Mississippi, named Chico. What started as a story about a frugal fan who gets tickets for free or sneaks into sporting events turned into a highly personal piece about the time Heckert spent with Chico. There was much more to the story than the assignment originally entailed. Chico was essentially homeless, living on the floor of a small office with no car, no money and no real friends. But he was one of the most well-known personalities in the town. Heckert turned in two drafts that lacked the personal elements of his time with Chico, and neither draft was successful with his editor. The third version talked about the experience, and it went over well. "I don't see how you spend a week with somebody every morning and night, and it's just a lie; that's just who he was," Heckert says. "It's not judging or editorializing. It's just this is how he made me feel. And that's one thing I think: Magazine journalism allows you to do this, and it's better."

Vanessa Grigoriadis, contributing editor for *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair* and *New York Magazine*, encountered a similar situation while on assignment for *Rolling Stone* in 2003. Charged with writing a piece about Paris Hilton, Grigoriadis gained Hilton's trust and went out for a night with the then it girl. Grigoriadis kept herself out of the story except for one mention of her purse being snatched while at an after party. The first-person blip in no way detracted from the piece but instead let the reader know that the writer was with Hilton for the night and not just relaying second-hand accounts. "It's the only real article that's ever been written about Paris Hilton," Grigoriadis says, adding that she wrote the piece in a cinematic, moment-by-moment way. "I'm the only person who's ever spent any time with her to actually understand what her personality is really like. I

got her to take me out at night with her. We had a really good time, and I felt like I really understood who she was."

Vanity Fair National Editor Todd Purdum covers celebrities but more typically those of a political nature. His long-form narratives are thoroughly reported and yet, at times, still immensely personal. When he wrote the highly controversial Bill Clinton piece "The Comeback Id" in July 2008 for *Vanity Fair*, he recognized the possible conflict of interest, or the alleged conflict of interest critics would assert. Married to Dee Dee Myers, the White House Press Secretary during the first two years of the Clinton administration, he knew he had to disclose the connection. So he did, quickly, in parentheses and with first-person. But the personal aspects of the story didn't stop with his spouse. Purdum worked for *The New York Times* for 23 years before *Vanity Fair*. In his more than two-decade run with the *Times,* he covered the Clinton White House from 1994 to 1997, which made constructing a piece about Clinton's character shift inherently personal. "I suppose you could say in the Bill Clinton piece, there was point of view," Purdum says. "I brought to the story my own experience of having watched him over many years and also my psychic trajectory, if you will, of mostly admiring him and still admiring things about him and also being increasingly disgusted by him." Purdum believes his reaction to Clinton was not uncommon among people who had previously thought highly of the former president. "I also made that very personal but not in a gratuitously personal sense," he says. "But I put myself in the picture as someone who was thinking about and reacting to him."

These personal experiences also came into account when Purdum took on the task of writing about his neighbor Karl Rove in December 2006 for *Vanity Fair*. Naturally, a

few personal anecdotes were bound to make the cut. He included interactions between Rove and him as well as interactions among Rove and other neighbors. He wrote about the time Rove brought Purdum's newspapers up the driveway to the front steps while the Purdum family was on vacation. Rove silently performed the kind gesture but made a joke about it when Purdum called him some time later for *The New York Times*. That anecdote, while old, was used to show Rove's personality and sense of humor in the *Vanity Fair* piece. "The point is I included a lot of that interaction in the piece, which I never ever would have done in a newspaper article because they wouldn't have let you," Purdum says. Interaction and personal anecdotes humanize writers and help them connect to their readers.

Point of View Develops Communities

As noted by Johnson and Prijatel (2007), magazines build communities by defining an audience and tailoring its content and approach to it. Until that audience is determined, nothing can progress. As Collins put it, the first thing a writer learns is purpose and audience. For a magazine editor, however, these points of emphasis take on even greater meanings. "It defines your audience; It defines the people who are interested in what you're doing and what they're reading in your magazine," *Washingtonian* Editor-at-Large Garrett Graff says of point of view. "It gives them a sense of personal identity. I think that it's clear through all of the market research that's been taking place over the last couple of years that magazines are very closely identified with personal identity."

Taking the personal identity of readers a step further, it can be argued that point of view establishes a specific persona for the magazine, which, ultimately, develops the

journalistic community between the magazine and its audience. Byrne of *BusinessWeek* says:

> At base level, the utility of a given publication is all about providing information that is helpful or useful to you or entertaining to you. ... I think a well-crafted magazine has the added burden or asset of having a persona that makes one closer to the publication above and beyond the utility. If we really deliver on this notion of trusted adviser, it really is true, the magazine's persona. And there's no stronger indication of that persona than the point of view you bring.

The personality of the publication relies on the writers and voices that comprise it. For Stengel, these writers need to be strong enough with interesting points of view to keep readers engaged and reading. "And I think that's what, particularly in a magazine, which is in some ways different than a newspaper, you want to be attached to different writers and different voices," Stengel says. "That's what makes you come back, and that's what makes you value the publication." With pressure essentially falling to the writers and those who edit them to keep the community alive and thriving, point of view becomes an important tool for communication. "I don't think for reporters that point of view is exciting," Katz says of the traditionally journalistic. "But to someone who is a writerly writer or a humorist, it's everything. You hope to entrance someone enough to keep reading it, to come back." Emphasizing relatability, Katz says point of view is essential. And he's not alone. "By bringing that, its very personal voice or point of view, it adds relatability," Stossel says. "It allows the reader to sympathize more. It can be an extra hand out to the reader to kind of help where you're doing something that's explanatory journalism. ... It's almost like reaching out your hand and saying, 'Let me take you along this journey with me.'"

Explanatory journalistic technique, one of the basic elements of point of view, benefits from the handholding approach emphasized by magazine writers and editors. "You're trying to connect to people in some sort of visceral way," Junod says. Taking the reader into account while developing a strong personality for the magazine is mandatory in the changing media landscape. Katz notes that magazines are consistently moving more into niche markets. "It's all about who you're targeting and who you're speaking to," he says. This move is both necessary and logical. Katz says:

> There's just too much choice out there, and I think that if you want to speak to your audience, you have to be more intimate with them. Importantly, speak to them using your voice and your point of view that they relate to it. You can't worry too much about speaking to too many people. That's the big difference. It's a smaller club. It's like with your friends. You all have a similar point of view, but you can't be friends with everyone.

Determining who to be friends with or who to market to and executing the mission well can lead to reader loyalty, i.e. sustenance. "I think point of view, in many cases, is essential to a magazine's persona in the marketplace and differentiation," Byrne says.

Point of View and Credibility

After readers are captured through successful audience determination, effective writing and overall relatability, the magazine is charged with keeping the reader and, ultimately, maintaining credibility. What sounds easy in theory is often ruined in practice, and point of view has the power to enhance or diminish it. "I think it helps credibility as long as it's fair and reasonable," Byrne says of point of view. "When it becomes an attack on an idea or a person or an organization, when it becomes a poke-in-the-eye-kind-of point of view, when it is provocative just for the sake of being provocative to inflame

others just to get a reaction, I think that's when it hurts your credibility." And that fits perfectly with the mission of *BusinessWeek*, but for other, edgier publications, being provocative is what they do. As someone who doesn't shy away from sensational, flashy writing, Grigoriadis is of the belief that point of view doesn't affect credibility, and Junod says people like what he does or they don't, they connect with it or they don't. But for others, considering this question is of utmost importance.

For Purdum, the issue of credibility is something he often wrestles with. In several instances, point of view's storytelling techniques, such as using anecdotes and explaining interaction, can be positive. "It's much, much more natural and realistic to share those things with the reader," Purdum says, adding that it's more honest to write about those situations. "They build your credibility with the reader as opposed to suppressing them, which is what you tend to do with straight newspaper reporting in which you are supposed to be a non-presence." Digging deeper and considering *Vanity Fair* Editor Graydon Carter's political beliefs and the publication's culturally liberal leanings, Purdum wonders whether someone who is not of the same mindset would immediately dismiss the work in the publication. "*Vanity Fair* is not aimed at Evangelical Christians or something, but if an Evangelical Christian reads it and can easily say this is more on the predictable path of the left-wing noise machine, then somehow you've probably, in a small way at least, missed a chance to make someone say, 'Gosh, I never thought of it this way.'" Along similar lines, Stossel of *The Atlantic* believes the way point of view affects credibility completely depends on the reader and that individual's personal beliefs. "I think our ideal readers, and most of the readers we have, it affects it in a positive way," he says. "They're trusting us to be honest brokers for presenting a range

of smart ... We're not going to present them anything that's stupid or not well-reasoned or that's just crazy." But when someone who isn't Stossel's "ideal reader," who is perhaps set much more stiffly in his or her ways, picks up the publication, credibility can be negatively affected. "And the fact that we publish something that's not to their ideology makes us instantly suspect, and we are apostates to the cause," he says. "That probably does hurt our credibility." Editing a magazine in political Washington, D.C., and having worked at the liberal *The American Prospect*, Stossel is in tune with the inner workings of today's partisan press. "I think the ideological magazines are less credible," he says. "They're just having to find new ways to justify defending social security on one side or privatizing health care or making the case for big government."

Outside D.C., in the rest of the country, avoiding accusatorial statements of partisan leanings is typically the goal. One way to dispel rumblings of bias is transparency, which by definition enhances credibility. "What I felt as a reader myself that undermined the credibility of a publication was that the writer wasn't giving his or her point of view," Stengel says. "And to me transparency affects credibility, and certainly authority reflects credibility. ... In my view, it enhances credibility." As Stengel noted in his March 3, 2008, "To Our Reader's" column, transparency is what readers question when newspapers print endorsements and in the same breath stress objectivity. In magazine writing, however, he believes expressing a point of view eliminates this reader questioning. Instead, it's transparent. "To me, being transparent, transparent about how you get to your point of view, is part of what modern point-of-view journalism is about," Stengel says. "You want to let the reader behind the curtain and see the mechanics of the thing and how you got there. Otherwise, it's like doing a mathematical

equation and just putting the conclusion without showing how you got there. I want the reader to see how the writer gets there."

Von Drehle, who writes for *Time* under Stengel's guidance, takes a transparent approach while constructing his pieces, which for him, means avoiding making statements that he doesn't defend with evidence. "What I try not to do, number one, is make assertions or claims that my readers have no way of evaluating for themselves," he says. "You can't show everything that goes into your conclusion, but you can show sort of what your thought process was, particularly if you say here's where I started out, here's where I ended up."

This takes on a heightened significance for Stengel in considering the current state of the media with myriad outlets for consumers to get news. "Part of it is that there is so much more information out there; the reader is more informed; the reader can actually make a better judgment about what you're writing than readers could in the pre-Internet age," Stengel says. "To me that's why transparency is important. That's why it feels more honest, and it feels more sophisticated, and it feels more modern."

Naturally, not everyone agrees. "There are certainly plenty of readers who think the opposite," Stengel says, adding that some media consumers yearn for pure, unachievable objectivity.

Point of View's Broader Advantages

Developing a community, making articles personal, providing relatability and increasing credibility are all advantages to point of view. But in some less direct ways, the advantages are bigger and more impressive. It's not just about capitalizing on what makes magazines unique and what a few scholars have been saying for decades (community, dialogue, etc.), it's about speaking to something higher, something more significant. And, ultimately, it's about keeping readers reading. Admitting that point of view is entertaining seems like a difficult thing for some (not all) writers and editors to do, but it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's why magazines have the potential to be so successful. "The advantages are entertainment-based," Grigoriadis says. "It's easier to read something that's fun to read, and certainly having a very distinct point of view, tone and voice with it is going to make it much easier to read." With media in a massive state of upheaval and publications moving more toward niche, point of view is taken into account more frequently. "The point remains that there is a decreasing interest in reading things that do not have the point of view in it," Grigoriadis says.

Point of view doesn't need to skirt around the issues. It can bring out something more than traditional newspaper writing can. Purdum says: "I think if it's done intelligently and sensitively with real factual undergirding, it gets at a bigger truth. It gets at something more essential. It gets at something deeper." Tom Junod took this a step further than traditional fact gathering when he wrote, "Steve Jobs and the Portal to the Invisible" for *Esquire's* October 2008 issue. Now nominated for a National Magazine Award, the piece is a complete write around — a story in which the main character is never interviewed. It was a story that Apple was adamantly against. "Steve Jobs is not a

friend of *Esquire*," Junod says. "It was very clear that I was never going to get Apple to participate, and, in fact, they did not. They did everything they could to stop me from writing the story." But he made calls, traveled to the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference uninvited, did not get in and talked to people outside the event. He was completely shut out and completely determined. It turned into more than a traditional write around in that it speaks to something deeper about Steve Jobs. It explains his personality and lifestyle, and it analyzes what it all means. "It was more of a write around in that I had a conception of his character, and I wrote that conception of his character," Junod says. "And I wasn't about to be stopped from doing it. The reporting was there to give me a conception of his character and to understand him more." The piece is all point of view but with a heavy level of solid reporting beneath. It took reporting to find out that Jobs is adopted, but it took analysis and point of view to explain to the reader what that means in terms of Jobs' personality. To Junod, however, there's no such thing as writing without point of view. "It's just intrinsic; it's intrinsic to the writing," he says. "Point of view to me is the kind of fundamental thing; I can't even imagine doing it without. To me, it's at the center of it rather than the outside. I don't see where it's added. I don't see where it's layered on. To me, it's what you start with." And with an opening sentence such as, "One day, Steve Jobs is going to die," it most definitely is.

Point of View's Disadvantages

Highly point-of-viewed writing, however, can come across as biased, self-indulgent, factually incorrect or over the top. To some, writing that Steve Jobs is going to die is going too far. To others, it's brilliant. There is a fine line that writers tow between

effective usage and complete misusage. “The clearest disadvantage to point of view is that if it’s not used properly, people are going to essentially assume that you have a bias,” Byrne of *BusinessWeek* says. “But point of view, depending on how it’s used, can make people think that you’re not fair, you’re not open to new and different ideas, you have an ax to grind, you’re propagating a specific ideology or point of view consistently. And for some magazines, that’s really good and important. For us, not.” Blatantly niche publications such as partisan magazines capitalize on specific ideologies, but for other publications that type of philosophy isn’t as effective. “There are plenty of magazine articles that are biased, but a good magazine article will be explicit about its bias or can make a bias part of a story itself,” Stossel says. “And in some ways, it’s more honest.” This is where one of point of view’s advantages can become a disadvantage.

Point of view has the ability to appeal to a specific audience, but it can go too far. “So point of view, voice, comes in to the extent that we are much more now writers, journalists, serving a particular audience,” Von Drehle says. “As I talk about that, you can see all the pitfalls of it. You start to be edited by your readers instead of by yourselves. You start massaging and appealing to the preconceived biases of your audience.” Von Drehle referenced certain writers, in particular, who he is rarely surprised by. He always knows what he’s going to get, and though that may be comforting, it is not journalistically brilliant. “I feel that way about Rick Hertzberg in *The New Yorker*,” Von Drehle says. “He’s a terrific writer, fantastic writer and sharp thinker. But I’m not sure I feel like he’s dealing off the top of the deck every week because he’s never a surprise. In a way, they think they know what I think because I subscribe to the magazine, and they’re kind of pandering to me. You’ve got to be careful about the pander factor.”

Engulfed in the pandering are journalistic liberties writers choose to take. While working with point of view, writers have the ability to experiment with different styles such as using first-person and personal experiences to illustrate a point. Purdum says personal-experience essays and excessive first person can turn into self-parody. "It's almost like the pink-cloud system when you're in the first flush of it," he says. "You have to be careful not to make your reader feel that you're not taking him or her along on the trip. ... And just because you can do it, you should always ask yourself, 'Is it the right thing to do?'" These types of writer-focused risks can also become lost on the reader. "A lot of people don't get it," Junod says. "It's very interesting seeing the response to things, things that I would think people would get. They don't and hate it."

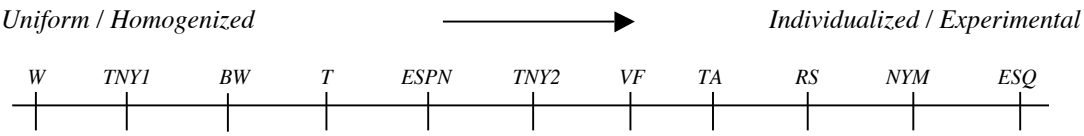
The Point-of-View Continuum

"First of all, there is point of view in everything," Grigoriadis says. Point of view permeates every aspect of the magazine world. It differs from publication to publication, but points of view are present in every piece of writing and every design and large-scale editorial choice. Magazines can be placed on a continuum that explains the degree to which point of view is employed. The most effective way to establish such a scale is to approach it from two directions. The first is a magazine's published mission statement, which is a publication's goal or editorial philosophy. Johnson and Prijatel (2007) write that mission statements explain a publication's intent, how it will approach what it covers and what voice it will use. Voice, more specifically, is the second element of the scale. As noted in the way magazine editors and writers described the concept of point of view, voice is a significant part of the definition. How a publication treats voice as seen through

the eyes of its editors and writers is telling in understanding point of view. According to Johnson and Prijatel (2007), "A magazine's identity is most easily defined by its voice" (p. 143).

When it comes to voice, some magazines shoot for uniformity while others embrace a variety of distinct voices and points of view. The publication's classification will vary based on who does the describing. In this study, editors and writers from 10 magazines (one interviewee represents more than one publication) with a variety of experiences at additional publications they have worked for in the past, spoke about voice and provided a multitude of varying opinions about it within the industry. Again, just as points of view differ, opinions do as well. For example, though one writer completely unaffiliated with *The Atlantic* deemed it as projecting a more uniform, institutional voice, another writer not affiliated with the publication thought it to be one of the most diverse in terms of voice and a variety of published viewpoints. Although the opinions of writers and editors on other publications were noted, for the most part only the opinions voiced about the publication of which they are employed or were employed in the past were taken into account for analysis. Ultimately, by comparing the published, official mission statement and the specific voice-based opinions of writers and editors provided a well-rounded basis for placement on the continuum. The left side of the continuum holds magazines that produce a more uniform, homogenized point of view. On the other end of the spectrum are magazines that promote individual, experimental points of view. The figure below illustrates where the publications in this study fit on the continuum.

Point-of-View Continuum



Key:
W = *Washingtonian*; TNY1 = *The New Yorker* (Front of Book)
BW = *BusinessWeek;* T= *Time*
ESPN = *ESPN the Magazine*
TNY2 = *The New Yorker* (Feature Well); VF = *Vanity Fair;* TA = *The Atlantic*
RS = *Rolling Stone;* NYM = *New York Magazine;* ESQ = *Esquire*

The continuum begins with publications that are traditionally more uniform and edges toward publications that publish intensely reported work that is almost entirely point of view. In some column-like instances, it is entirely point of view. In the middle of the scale rests magazines that take a more even-handed approach by combining traditional fact-gathering techniques with nontraditional writing that includes point of view. The writing is more vibrant than that of a traditional newspaper story written with an inverted-pyramid approach, and these magazine pieces could rarely be considered completely objective.

Of the magazines represented in this study, *The Washingtonian* stands out as the most uniform with voice and point of view. A portion of the mission statement reads:

> *The Washingtonian*, the magazine Washington lives by, is the region's top source of information for dining, shopping, entertainment, and personalities. It has been Washington's most trusted guide to living, working, and playing in the area for more than four decades thanks to features like "100 Very Best Restaurants," "Top Doctors," and "Great Places to Live."

The heavy service approach and information-based model underscores its efforts at capturing a wide-reaching target audience. This often means less voice and point of view in writing. In seeking everyone, it's important for the publication to offend few. Graff

says: “It’s written for a mass audience who has a wide range of ages. I think the voice of the magazine is that we try to make it such that there aren’t too many people who pick it up and say this magazine wasn’t written for me.” A goal of this manner leads the way toward uniformity. Graff describes the uniform approach in terms of an overall writing and editing style as well as the overt mission. “The difference between a good magazine and a great magazine is the ability to define a unifying characteristic of design, tone, voice and subject matter,” Graff says, citing *Texas Monthly* and *New York* as examples of city and regional magazines that do this well. *Texas Monthly*, he says, uses the characteristic of “big” in everything and *New York’s*, while harder to discern, is likely of a celebrity nature. Although Graff says *Washingtonian* doesn’t do it nearly as well as it could, there is still a unifying characteristic. “I think the unifying characteristic of Washington is explaining how the city operates, which is helping people live, work and play here,” he says. “Everything that we do is in some way geared toward helping our readers understand how this city operates.” The service-centered approach drives the publication, but Graff believes there is a production disconnect. “The thing is that we have a breakdown in the magazine between the content and the voice and the design and the voice.” What Graff refers to as a unifying characteristic is often considered a house style in other publications. To a certain degree, and in many instances, it can be considered an overarching mission for the publication. A house style also doesn’t necessarily dictate how uniform the voices of the publication will be. For instance, *Washingtonian* just happens to also be uniform in voice. “I think *Washingtonian* has one of the most uniform voices in magazines because Jack (Limpert), the editor, has a very specific editing style,” he says. “And by virtue of him editing all the pieces they end up

with a very uniform voice. It's edited very carefully to ensure sort of an even-handed, middle-of-the-road approach. It's not as snarky as other magazines. It's not as formal as other magazines."

After *Washingtonian* comes the trickiest of magazines on the point-of-view scale: *The New Yorker*. As a full book, *The New Yorker* doesn't fit nicely or completely on the continuum. In an effort to effectively diagnose this publication, it will appear twice on the scale based on two distinct sections of the book: the front of the book and the feature well. Its mission statement reads:

> The New Yorker is a collection of intelligent, funny, and penetrating voices. It is also a collection of deeply distinctive approaches, senses of humor, levels of reporting, and ways of looking at life. In every issue, a signature mix of culture and art, business and politics, fashion and design, science and technology attract millions who come to The New Yorker to be informed, to be surprised, to laugh, and to be moved.

Based on its editorial philosophy, a media consumer could assume *The New Yorker* is the most experimental of magazines, especially those covered in this study, in that it openly strives for myriad voices and points of view. Any recognition of homogenous inklings would go directly against its published goal.

As the most randomly mentioned publication in the 11 interviews conducted, *The New Yorker,* despite a mission statement that stresses a variety of voices, remains difficult to categorize. Although it's widely recognized as (and strives to be) a publication with a multitude of voices, many interviewees were quick to mention the publication's institutional voice. "Everybody has a house style," Grigoriadis says. "Obviously *The New*

Yorker more than many other magazines." Stengel of *Time* has written for *The New Yorker* and asserts a similar opinion. "I actually think *The New Yorker*, in a weird way, has a more homogenized voice than other magazines, even though everybody thinks that they are the magazine of different voices."

Collins, who is currently of *The New Yorker,* says with experience comes freedom in terms of what risks a writer can take with voice at *The New Yorker*. "At least as you're getting started, there's more of a house tone, particularly with 'Talk of the Town,'" she says, characterizing the tone of the front-of-the-book section as wry. "Another interesting thing is that tone has really changed over the years. Years ago in 'Talk,' for instance, they used the *we* and that sort of thing. I think bylines were instituted in 'Talk' when Tina Brown was editor. Of course with bylines, I think there are a multiplicity of voices." Although the *we* has been largely abandoned, *The New Yorker* still asserts a unique writing perspective in using first-person and often with attributions. By using *I* instead of *we* in attributions, interaction is shown between the wrier and subject, which leads to transparency. It's an unusual attribution technique, but it's legendary and well-regarded as something that only *The New Yorker* employs. As the *I* continues out of "Talk of the Town" and into the feature well, individual voices are more likely. Variety can be seen throughout the rest of the publication, namely the feature well, and will be touched on later on the continuum.

Continuing on the scale, point of view becomes much more traditionally journalistic in nature but with unorthodox, individualized takes. *BusinessWeek's* mission statement reads:

> Our mission is to be an indispensable resource for business leaders worldwide. Through trusted content, intelligent context, and open collaboration, we empower them to make smarter decisions in their businesses, careers, and investments. Time-pressed professionals rely on BusinessWeek to maximize opportunity and turn insight into action.

In providing reliable content that can help guide important business decisions, taking outrageous and experimental approaches and points of view would not serve its mission. At the same time, pieces with no take wouldn't either. John Byrne's *BusinessWeek* employs a calm, even-handed approach while embracing the role of trusted business adviser. This role could be considered *BusinessWeek's* house style. It emphasizes fairness by taking counter-arguments into account and yet still expresses a point of view in every piece of published work. "I think there's a general tone in the magazine that point of view is an important part of that reinforces the notion that we're really fair, respect both sides and want to be your trusted adviser," Byrne says, adding that beat-centric columnists such as Mike Mandel, economics, and Jon Fine, media, will at times deviate with a sharper approach. "I think there are certain individuals who are personalities of the magazine whose point of view clearly reflects who they are as opposed to what the magazine is." Essentially, it is understood that the columnist writing is speaking on the part of him or herself and not of the entire publication. The point of view expressed is purely his or her own.

Point of view, personal or publication-based, is put forth in all aspects of the magazine. "Some of the point of view incidentally isn't necessarily written because you express point of view through design, through photography, through illustrations," Byrne says. "Of course there's a point of view in pretty much all the stories, but we often give a significant amount of space in the story to an opposing point of view. Our point of view,

which should pervade almost every story is we're making important choices about what we put in the magazine because we're your trusted adviser."

Time also approaches its stories in a traditionally journalistic fashion but with a heavier dose of point of view than is found in *BusinessWeek*. Part of *Time's* mission statement reads:

> TIME has set the standard for leadership, authenticity and authoritative journalism since 1923. Analytical and insightful, lively and engaging, TIME remains the unequivocal leader among newsmagazines and it is the publication more readers choose than any other newsmagazine. ... Everything else is optional — TIME is essential.

As noted in defining point of view, striving for authority or an authorial voice is an essential portion of taking a point of view. Authority is directly mentioned in *Time's* mission, as is the necessity to provide analysis and insight in published work. "I want the *Time* writers to all ... for readers to feel like they have different voices as well as points of view, and that it shouldn't be homogenized," Stengel says. Under Stengel's helm, *Time* has been bolder than in years past. Cover stories often have a compelling take from as early as the sell lines. Although explanatory journalism is at the core of what *Time* does, taking a stand is newly necessary for the publication. One of the most notable, or noticed, stances was the green border on the April 28, 2008, issue. "Part of what some of that boldness is about is actually grabbing people by the lapel and saying pay attention," Stengel says of the blatant advocacy. "Putting the green border on the magazine. Wow. Is it gimmicky? Yeah. Is it also a gimmick with some service to a larger idea? Yes. And it's often calculated to get people to pay attention." Media pundits and readers alike took notice as was evident when Stengel appeared on MSNBC's *Morning Joe* to speak about

the interesting call. What's intriguing is that these stances are in many ways a return to the past.

For the majority of *Time's* life, it operated within a much different model. There were writers, and there were reporters. The reporters submitted pages of text from their respective bureaus on a weekly basis. The writers would then take the reports and form them into a standard *Time* story. "The best of them had identifiable, individual voices, but it was far more important that all of it be a kind of homogenized *Time* voice," Von Drehle says of the writers. "And then after they filed their copy, then there was this huge layer of editors, fact checkers, copy editors, who would then further homogenize it. ... There's no demand anymore or very little demand for that homogenized voice, and the economics no longer support the apparatus." This model worked for decades, but since Stengel became *Time's* managing editor in 2006, he has stressed the reintroduction of point of view, essentially taking *Time* back closer to its Henry Luce and Briton Hadden roots. "When *Time* was started under Luce and Hadden, the stories all had a very strong point of view," Stengel says. "In fact, they weren't even trying to be objective and then give a point of view." As noted by Ward (2006), Luce was a clear critic of objectivity. That being said, the difference between the *Time* of the '20s and the *Time* of today is an attempt at vivid moments of objectivity.

Keeping objectivity and the thorough reporting of facts in tow, *ESPN The Magazine* comes next on the point of view spectrum. Its mission statement reads:

> ESPN The Magazine is for young men who want to stay on top of the athletes, teams, topics and upcoming events in their own sports world. With both humorous and hard-hitting columns, insightful and compelling features, along with a variety of departments that make the reader a true

> insider, ESPN The Magazine celebrates not only sports, but the cultures and lifestyles that are so much a part of them.

Working for a niche sports publication and edging into more long-form narrative storytelling techniques, Heckert uses voice but expresses few overt opinions in his work. Voice is what he looks for as a reader and strives to have as a writer. "When I read a story by somebody else, I want to read their voice," he says. "It's not necessarily coming out and saying something sucks or is good or is evil. It's really just presenting it in a way where you learn something and can make up your own mind about it. As a writer, there are instances where you can come out and just say it, but oftentimes it's presenting something in a certain way to a reader, and they'll be able to be like 'Oh, yeah. I didn't know that.'" At *ESPN*, Heckert is encouraged to experiment with style as well as have his own voice and point of view. "*ESPN* touts itself as having this voice," he says. "It's like this unique, fresher voice than say *Sports Illustrated* has. But I think in all this hipness, they really do want people to have a point of view."

After *ESPN,* is the high-end general-interest section of the scale where *The New Yorker* makes its second appearance. Where "Talk of the Town" portrays a more unified voice and perspective, the long-form features that comprise the rest of the publication exhibit a variety of voices. With a collection of famous and diverse writers, the well is bound to change from story to story and issue to issue. There is simply no way Malcom Gladwell will ever sound like John McPhee and vice versa. But *New Yorker* readers don't expect out-of-the-ordinary, experimental writing styles. "Even though *The New Yorker's* writing is drier, they still have a point of view in their stories," Heckert says. In describing *Esquire's* commitment to voice, Katz also commented on *The New Yorker's*

use of a journalistic template, "The writers, when they're writing for *The New Yorker,* don't go crazy." In a very clear way, readers seem to know what they're getting when they open the pages of *The New Yorker* every week. Stossel of *The Atlantic* says:

> *The New Yorker's* absolutely a terrific magazine, and it has many of the best writers in the country, but there's a definite *New Yorker* tone. And it's not that they never deviate from it, but a lot of the politics tends to be of an Upper West Side, liberal slant. The writing is often subdued. Anthony Lane is a pretty lively writer, but there's kind of a *New Yorker* voice, which is reassuring and arch and elegant.

Although it strives for an element of surprise in its "deeply distinctive approaches," *The New Yorker* might be missing the mark on the depth of its overall mission. But it undoubtedly still puts forth a variety of voices in part of the publication.

A bit more experimental than arch and elegant in the grouping of high-end general-interest magazines is *Vanity Fair*, a publication with a unique editorial mix that capitalizes on fashion and celebrity while advancing in-depth, small book-length features similar to *The New Yorker*. Its mission statement reads:

> From entertainment to world affairs, business to style, design to society, *Vanity Fair* is a cultural catalyst—a magazine that provokes and drives the popular dialogue. With its unique mix of stunning photography, in-depth reportage, and social commentary, *Vanity Fair* accelerates ideas and images to center stage. Each month, *Vanity Fair* is an unrivaled media event that reaches millions of modern, sophisticated consumers who create demand for your brand.

This varied editorial mix often sparks attention with the glitzy celebrity-focused covers, but it openly seeks in-depth reporting and social commentary. Its editorial philosophy doesn't mention celebrities; it strives for more traditional journalistic legitimacy. "The

trick for *Vanity Fair* is to get respect for the serious articles without losing the enormous pop-culture engine that fuels the train and keeps it all going," Purdum says, adding that he has never understood *Vanity Fair* to have an established take on a subject despite Editor Graydon Carter's outspoken political views. "No one's ever told me, 'You're going to write this piece and take this point of view.'" Just as points of view are varied, voice is highly individualized based on the writer and the story, according to Purdum. Purdum says:

> Point of view throughout the magazine is often used in a very direct way. When Dominick Dunne is covering a trial or something, he makes clear his own views. He makes clear who he's rooting for or who he believes or who he doesn't trust. I think it's quite common in the celebrity profiles for the interviewer to describe being in the universe of the celebrity person, interacting with them, what it's like to negotiate terms of seeing them sometimes. I think point of view is throughout the magazine in all sorts of ways. ... I think it permeates probably every aspect of the magazine.

The Atlantic takes these distinct voices and individualized approaches a step further in its ideologically varied editorial mix. Its mission statement reads:

> *The Atlantic* is America's leading destination for brave thinking and bold ideas that matter. We engage our print, online, and live audiences with breakthrough insights into the worlds of politics, business, the arts, and culture. With exceptional talent deployed against the world's most important and intriguing topics, *The Atlantic* is the source of opinion, commentary, and analysis for America's most influential individuals who wish to be challenged, informed, and entertained.

The Atlantic is bolder and more direct than *Vanity Fair* in its mission. It doesn't take a hyperbolic approach such as declaring the publication an event, but it more specifically outlines what it covers, how it will cover it and what its target is — ideas. Interested in a variety of perspectives, *The Atlantic* seeks out writers who can express liberal and conservative points of view in addition to the pros and cons of various issues. The

founding statement of the publication was, "We should be of no party or clique," according to Stossel. Although that was a politically charged statement in 1857, it still applies to *The Atlantic* today and in a much more expansive way. "Actually, one thing that's unique to *The Atlantic* is we're always interested in ideas," Stossel says. "We're interested in news. We're interested in getting all of our facts right, but in a way that's different from say *Esquire* or even *The New Yorker,* we're almost always wanting to convey some really interesting, original idea." What arguably go hand in hand with sometimes provocative and often newly discussed ideas are original voices and the absolution of a house tone. "There used to be a little bit of one, but we almost explicitly disavow that," Stossel says of a house tone, adding that writers are encouraged to take individualized points of view more often now than in the past. "There's no single *Atlantic* voice. We are lively, smart voices talking to each other. Now, there is a kind of sensibility, which is a little bit different. It's tricky. ... We have our own tone, but it's not reflected by a uniformity of voice or point of view."

Departing from the high-end general-interest faction, the scale dips into often more youthful and edgy niche publications. Representing *Rolling Stone* and *New York Magazine,* Grigoriadis brings her distinct style to her work regardless of which publication she is writing for. *Rolling Stone's* mission statement reads:

> *Rolling Stone* magazine is a cultural icon. It's the original—and it's still the number one pop culture reference point for young adults. In addition to its authoritative position in music *Rolling Stone's* sphere of influence reaches into entertainment, movies, television, national affairs and current events—everything that's important, trend-setting and newsworthy among today's thought leaders.

Rolling Stone stresses pop culture in its mission but also mentions national affairs, current events and authority. Regardless of the topic, the writing itself is overtly authoritative and contains point of view without using first person.

New York's mission statement reads, "*New York* Magazine covers, analyzes, comments on and defines the news, culture, entertainment, lifestyle, fashion and personalities that drive New York City." Continuing the focus on analysis and commentary, *New York* advocates points of view. Grigoriadis holds contributing editor jobs at *Rolling Stone, New York* and *Vanity Fair*, but she has also done freelance work for a variety of publications, including *Men's Journal*, *Nylon* and *Elle*. Although she won't hold punches in any of her work and insists she's not in the journalism business to make friends, she takes the reader into account when she's writing. "In a way, for me, writing for *New York Magazine* is much more intimate because I feel like I'm really talking to my peers whereas with *Rolling Stone*, I feel like I'm talking to a 20-year-old guy who I don't even know," she says, adding that the differences between the two publications stretch further into the writing of the piece. Grigoriadis says:

> We can use profanity in *Rolling Stone* in a way that we can't here (*New York*). But that actually matters because people do curse a lot. I think it's just a much more masculine publication, maybe a little bit lower of a reading level. They really just want everything to be clear. They don't want to have any confusion in the mind of the reader. They want a couple points made. They want them really etched in, and then they want to get out of the piece.

Although that bluntness works for Grigoriadis, she notes how that differs at *New York* where she can be more experimental: "Here, we are much more likely to take creative steps that may or may not pay off. There are certainly pieces in this magazine, and that

I've written as well, that are not finished, that are not perfect. They're just kind of thoughts written on deadline with as much information as we can get."

A variety of thoughts, writing styles and experimentation is expected with each issue of *Esquire*, which rests at the far, experimental end of the point-of-view continuum. Its mission statement reads, "*Esquire* surveys the landscape to unearth the smart edge of culture: the people, places, things, and trends that intelligent, sophisticated men want, need, and ought to know." While *Esquire* is unearthing the unknown, it's looking for smart, new ways to present information and compose stories. It's extraordinarily nontraditional. In comparison to the other nine magazines represented in this study, *Esquire* is the most creative and provocative with point-of-view usage. In recent issues, *Esquire* used electronic ink, which simulated flashing type, on the cover to celebrate its 75th anniversary, it hid a cover ad under a peek-a-boo door, and it published a perforated mix-and match-cover of Barack Obama, George Clooney and Justin Timberlake to illustrate its "How to be a Man" issue. These experimental takes translate into the printed word as well. "I think that at a publication like *Esquire* with narrative journalism, half of it is entertainment however you define that whether that means entertainment by a really thoughtful, long feature about something very serious or entertainment as humor or anything like that," Katz says. With Writer-at-Large Tom Junod advancing the long-form features and Katz writing the humor essays, the two staffers are prime examples of the written work conducted at the publication and the overarching point of view. "I think its point of view is to be a literary and entertainment magazine, and within that, each writer should have their own individual points of view on the world and bring that to the story," Katz says. The publication's overarching point of view and goal, according to Katz, of

being a literary and entertainment magazine can be considered its house style while the individualized points of view are expressed through voice. Katz cites voice as the element of greatest significance at the publication. “We are a magazine that really emphasizes voice above all else,” he says. “I would say sometimes to the detriment of the story. If we err, we err on that side.”

The voices, though distinct, are definitely that of a men’s magazine, according to Junod. Junod has written for *Esquire* for 11 years, and before *Esquire,* he wrote for *GQ* for five. “I’ve never written for anything but men’s magazines, so I’m like Mr. Men’s Magazine,” says Junod, citing *Life* and *Atlanta Magazine* as exceptions. “It’s sort of a self parody in some ways. It’s like, you know, men, men, men. I’ve been writing so long in that way that I can’t even imagine writing another way. And, of course, men’s magazines, they totally encourage you to have this point of view.” The point of view of a men’s magazine writer caters to the interests of men and men of an ideal pedigree. “We write for men of certain education as does *GQ* as does *Details*,” Katz says. “That’s mostly the only thing that unites all the stories.” And at a magazine such as *Esquire,* the voice can shift markedly with each piece. “I think my voice changes story to story more than most writers,” Junod says. “I’ve done all sorts of crazy things. I mean, I wrote a story in rap.” These unique voices and approaches are essential to the success of *Esquire*. Katz says during his time as an articles editor, rather than spend a lot of time working with a writer on voice, it was more often that the story would be killed. Either it had it, or it didn’t.

In viewing the scale established by interviews in this study, patterns emerge. As noted by Graff of *Washingtonian,* the publication’s point of view, though it exists in

every aspect of the magazine, is undoubtedly uniform. At *Washingtonian*, the individuality of writers' work is often peeled from the original product, and the end result is a cohesive book devoid of surprises related to voice from page to page. When Katz worked at *Time Out New York,* a similar process existed. "There are editors at some magazines that just try to meld everything into one voice," Katz says. "That's not necessarily bad as a business model. Like *Time Out*, that's what we did." This journalistic model, when used, attempts to appeal to mass audiences in the format of almost all-encompassing general-interest magazines, the kind that no longer truly exist. The old general-interest publications strove to attract the masses, and that is obviously the model that runs newspapers: Produce a homogenized product that will appeal to everyone in a given locale. This impassioned voice of *Washingtonian* and even *Time Out* is what Junod and others say is often sought by media consumers. "And yet the thing that people seem to crave is a certain amount of an institutional stamp on things," Junod says. "To me, a certain dullness. People seem to like that and to be really reassured by that. Or it tells them that they're reading quality stuff instead of the shit that's out there. So I think that when one really tries to put forth a point of view, I think you sort of lose the benefit of the doubt a little bit." And yet, the majority of the magazines, especially the newsweeklies, discussed in this study are moving toward an increase in points of view rather than a decrease.

The newsweekly sect of the scale — *BusinessWeek* in the business and niche world and *Time* in the straight news world — are toting a fine line between traditional journalism and experimental points of view. For the purpose of this study, *BusinessWeek* occupied a niche categorization; however, it can also be considered a niche newsweekly.

Taking the more timid approach, *BusinessWeek* strives for an abundance of fair reporting with levelheaded guidance for business professionals. This approach, which *Time* also employs but with more vibrant advocacy and point-of-view choices, capitalizes on extensive reporting, good writing and the occasional anecdote. Lacking space and working with a frequent production schedule, these writers aren't delving deep into their journalistic tool bags for weapons of strong, literary prose. They are instead providing entertaining, relatively short and well-written takes on important issues affecting the every day.

After newsweeklies are niche publications *ESPN* and *Rolling Stone* on the point-of-view continuum. Publishing longer stories rich with narrative, literary techniques, these publications produce various, individual points of view. Clearly as target audiences change, so does the appeal of varied voices and bold choices. As the target demographic moves toward a younger audience (*Rolling Stone)* and from an older (*BusinessWeek),* the voices and points of view become more distinct. It can also be argued that as the subject matter becomes less serious from business to entertainment and ultimately men's interests (*Esquire)*, the level of formality changes. Although *ESPN* is using literary journalism techniques and producing long-form features, it is by no means as experimental as *Esquire*.

The grouping of high-end general-interest publications together but not at the completely individualized end of the spectrum is also a point of interest. What writers and consumers laud as the most experimental and most varied in voices in theory (*The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and *The Atlantic*) are arguably outshone in print by the younger and bolder publications (*Rolling Stone*, *New York* and *Esquire)* that come later on the

continuum. With older audiences and often more serious (or dry) subject matter, these high-end general-interest publications are more intellectual and reputable than most. But magazines such as *New York* and *Esquire* also achieve great acclaim for their work and experiments in the field. Reputation doesn't dictate liberties taken with point of view. Target audiences as well as experimental editors and writers are most at work in establishing a magazine's home on the continuum. Mission statements and voice employed throughout the publications make this clear.

Chapter V

Does History Repeat Itself?

Abandoning the Objective-Subjective Continuum

Emphasizing fact gathering and reporting methods, nine of the 11 interviewees stressed that objectivity and point of view are not in conflict. The other two did not believe that the two concepts are in conflict but rather that understanding objectivity is complex. Mindich's (1998) traditional definition of objectivity has five components: detachment, nonpartisanship, the inverted-pyramid writing style, facticity and balance. This definition is immediately in conflict with the work the 11 journalists interviewed for this study produce. None of the writers or editors in the study relies on the inverted pyramid, and few would say these writers are completely detached from the work they are conducting. In fact, in certain instances, writers such as Justin Heckert, Vanessa Grigoriadis, Tom Junod and David Katz are completely immersed in the subject matter and are undoubtedly attached. Using that definition to understand what has traditionally guided journalists in terms of objectivity, Ward (2006) provides a much more modern approach and an approach that can partially coexist with point of view. Ward (2006) writes: "Pragmatic objectivity is the epistemic evaluation of truth-seeking inquiry in journalism. It guides the difficult search for verified truths, and it restrains partiality" (p. 297). Ward's definition emphasizes reporting, fact gathering and an overall impartial approach.

Referencing former New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Purdum says, "Everyone's entitled to his or her own opinions but not to his or her own facts." With much of point of viewed, magazine-style writing, the emphasis on heavy reporting remains. "The nuts and bolts of reporting don't go away," Junod says. "The factuality doesn't go away." Strongly differentiating between reporting and writing, Von Drehle believes objectivity can manifest in the beginning steps of the journalistic process. " I do believe though that there is such thing as objectivity in reporting," Von Drehle says. "What that means is sort of forming an honest and, in the philosophical sense, a disinterested approach to a subject. Not uninterested. You're passionately interested, but you don't take an interest in coming out any particular way." This is one way to interpret Ward's (2006) point of restraining partiality. This restraint can mean approaching the reporting process in an impartial manner. Taking this a step further, Von Drehle asserts that a good reporter must be open-minded to all information he or she encounters. "And that in the fact-finding, fact-gathering process, you're as open to persuasion and new information as it's possible to be," he says. "And that to me is the objective process."

After the reporting process comes analysis and interpretation. "I think, in fact, the most effective point-of-view writing occurs when the facts are incontrovertibly established," Purdum says. "When you've really nailed the factual circumstances, it gives you greater license to noodle on what it all means." Ward's definition of pragmatic objectivity stresses impartiality in reporting but makes room for interpretation. Ward (2006) writes: "In coming to judgments of any kind, individuals combine valuing, observation, interpreting, and theorizing. Value judgments can be as rational and as holistic as other types of judgments" (p. 303). For practicing magazine writers and

editors, this is where areas of gray on the objectivity-subjectivity scale become apparent. "I certainly never put anything into any piece of writing that I don't think is true; I'm not in the business of trying to get sued," Grigoriadis says. "I think the facts are basically objective, but nobody would deny that you're putting them in a certain order, and you're making a claim about them. You're not just listing them. It's all in the reading between the lines about those facts." Although the facts are irrefutable, framing those facts into a desired story is at work.

Making value judgments, framing and determining a truth for some writers has nothing to do with objectivity. With certain experiences, writers such as Junod have lost faith in traditionally objective approaches to journalism. "There's a bit of a difference between objectivity and truth," Junod says, referencing a newspaper article that was written after his piece "Mercenary" was published in *Esquire* in 2007. Junod describes the *Esquire* feature as about "this liar I met." In greater detail, the story is about a man who calls himself Zeke and worked as a security manager of a nuclear power plant on Lake Michigan. He said he had been a sniper for Blackwater in Iraq and Afghanistan and had killed so many people that he classified himself as a "cold-blooded murderer." He wove an intense web of lies for Junod to follow for months while holding an intensely important job at the plant, the kind of job you want a highly qualified individual in, not a deranged liar. The piece naturally attracted attention and coverage in local Michigan media. Junod says the "objective" newspaper article was his word versus the subject's word, and the coverage was ultimately lazy. He says:

> I read it, and I was just like, is this what it is? Is this what objectivity is? Objectivity in that level seemed the antithesis of journalism. It seemed the antithesis of truth. It seemed the antithesis of anything. ... I think

> objectivity becomes a lazy response in a lot of ways. To me, trying to tell the truth or trying to be fair, to me all those things have very little to do with objectivity. Because to me, you have to acknowledge somewhere along the line that you are one person who is trying to tell a story.

Although some of Junod's unorthodox storytelling techniques might stretch Ward's idea of pragmatic objectivity, the two are explaining a similar belief. Ward (2006) writes that there are levels of confusion related to traditional objectivity:

> It stems from the view that objectivity must be "value-free." The vagueness of "value-free" encourages many misunderstandings about what objectivity requires. One interpretation is that the objective stance must be completely neutral not only towards all sides in a dispute but towards all values or preferences. To be non-neutral introduces, almost automatically, an unacceptable subjectivity into objective judgment (p. 307).

A non-neutral, value-free approach can often produce the he-says, she-says accounts of so many mainstream outlets today, the articles that Junod and several other study participants openly question. Although Graff believes point of view and objectivity are complementary, he, too, struggles with traditional definitions of objectivity. He says:

> I think the difference is that we view, in journalism, objectivity as this false construct where there is no truth. It's less objective and more sort of moral relativism. You end up with these he-said, she-said, who-knows articles. ... Whereas I think the value of point of view, the value of fairness, is that you can, to the best of your ability, understand a subject while you're writing about it, know how to judge it but also by understanding it, understand enough to not judge it more harshly than it deserves to be judged.

Graff's test of whether something is fairly evaluated is if he would be willing to sit across from the person he profiled while he or she reads the piece. "That doesn't mean I can't have a point of view; that just means I have to be able to justify my point of view," he says. Fairness is emphasized in Ward's (2006) third theoretical standard of pragmatic objectivity: the standards of rational debate, "which test how fair we have been in

representing the claims of others and in opening up our claims to the scrutiny of others" (p. 283). Byrne and Collins also stress being fair to their subjects in their work. "I think it's really important to give someone a fair shake," Collins says. "The one thing I try not to do is kick someone when they're down." Although fairness was emphasized by a number of interviewees, magazine articles are more interpretive, more analytical and often more critical than pieces in other forms of journalistic media.

Ward's (2006) theories allow for this interpretation and analysis that magazine writers pride themselves on. But for point-of-view writing that falls on the more extreme side of the scale, pragmatic objectivity might still be too conservative. To encompass all levels of point of view, it's perhaps best to abandon the objective-subjective continuum. "I don't think that point of view is on the continuum of objectivity to subjectivity that we're taught in journalism school," Von Drehle says. "I'm not sure point of view really fits on that continuum at all. I've always had sort of an unorthodox view about this idea of objectivity in journalism because of the imperative of storytelling, that it needs structure and voice. It can't just be a list. The idea of the objective voice in writing is, I think, kind of a figment." Voice is inherently a part of good storytelling. Although Ward (2006) provides the modern and more realistic concept of pragmatic objectivity, he still stresses impartiality, and that's a tricky force to identify within point-of-view work.

Differentiating Among Mediums

Just as levels of objectivity differ depending on the medium, so does point of view. A common thread that stretched throughout the 11 in-depth interviews was how even though there might be point of view in most writing, magazines have the ability to

utilize this technique with much greater frequency and impact than any other journalistic medium. Nine interviewees stressed, in particular, this difference between magazines and newspapers. Point of view becomes a defining factor for magazines. Traditionally, newspapers have been outlets for writing that lacks point of view through championing neutrality, a non-presence and objectivity. "I think that the difference between newspaper writing and magazine writing is that at magazines, you're supposed to understand a subject fully enough that you know what to say about it," Graff says, adding that he will report a story for months before writing it. "Whereas newspapers, there's a higher degree of uncertainty and real-time fact gathering that you may not necessarily know what you're talking about." Reflecting on his 23 years at *The New York Times* and his switch to magazine writing with *Vanity Fair*, Purdum says:

> I guess one of the things that's been a challenge to learn, in newspaper writing, you're not supposed to have a point of view. In magazine writing, you're not only allowed to have a point of view, you absolutely have to have a point of view. And that doesn't mean you're just supposed to substitute your opinion for information or facts, but it means that at the end of a 5,000- or 10,000-word-magazine article, the reader should really know, must know what you think and feel about it because otherwise it's too much effort to invest in you if they don't know.

Point of view is what media consumers expect from magazines. Analysis and interpretation are cornerstones of mission statements. Without analysis, there would be little reason to turn to a long-form feature in a magazine. In many instances, a piece devoid of interpretation would just be three-month-old news.

To a degree, the guiding principles of newspaper and magazine journalism remain the same, but the mediums are changing. With newspapers declaring bankruptcy, magazines and newspapers going under and publications that stay afloat slashing staff

positions, it's clear that the modern golden age, as journalists knew it, is over. Distinguishing between newspapers and magazines, Von Drehle describes the most basic differences. "To get into specifics, magazines are more free to do this, and it's more important for magazines to do it," Von Drehle says of point of view. But his rationale stems from the way magazines approach audiences in comparison to newspapers. He says:

> Newspapers, and this is all changing with the collapse of the monopoly newspaper, but in my lifetime and in the beginning of your career, we were in this era where the newspaper business had essentially become a series of regional monopolies. ... And if you look at how a monopoly has to behave vis-à-vis its customers, once you're a monopoly, you're not starting with a target audience and trying to build it anymore. You're trying to serve everybody. ... So that's what newspapers had to do. They had to not piss people off. Magazines have never been in that business. There's never been a magazine trying to get everybody. Even *Time* magazine, which has a huge audience by magazine standards, or *Reader's Digest* still has point of view. It's never trying to be all things to all people.

Specific target audiences are one of the defining characteristics of magazines. When building communities is such a priority, magazine publishers, writers and editors realize that to be successful in developing an imagined community, the audience needs to be particular. Targeting the masses is not a fruitful formula.

Byrne of *BusinessWeek* also provides a brief history lesson, but he explains how point of view has altered within the field over the years. Essentially, it has turned into a survival technique. "Some of the differentiation between a newspaper and a magazine used to be differentiation around point of view," Byrne says, adding that consumers would get their daily news in a newspaper and their analysis, judgment and a bit of forward spin in the newsweeklies. "What's happened is newspapers have had to move up

the value chain. So moving up the value chain, newspapers began to and now clearly they do what newsweeklies had done 10 years ago. They can provide point of view in a newspaper and an analysis." As a consequence of this shift, magazines need more original content that doesn't depend on that week's news cycle, and points of view have changed as well. "Point of view tends to be a little bit sharper as a result of this move up the value chain by newspapers and online sites," Byrne says. Stengel not only embraces this shift in point of view for the magazine world as demonstrated by his efforts with *Time*, but he also emphasizes how newspapers have changed. Stengel says:

> I think this point of view is something that people gradually have been moving toward. I don't think Bill Keller, the (executive) editor of *The New York Times*, has articulated the point of view theory like I have. I don't think he talks about it. But if you look at *The New York Times* today, virtually every news story on the *Times* front page, or anywhere in the newspaper, 10 years ago would have been labeled an analysis story. And the analysis stories today are stories with a very strong point of view. The line has moved in a pretty radical way, and I think it's kind of a coin of the realm now even if people don't realize it.

This shift, as Byrne put it, is forcing newspapers to move up the value chain. In turn, magazines need to do something bolder and experimental to say afloat in an environment where newspapers are filling the gap magazines did just a decade ago. "In general, a lot of magazines try to be far more provocative," Byrne says. "There's a need to do point of view in a way that actually is revealing. It's revealing in a sense that it challenges the way you think about a certain topic or person or organization. There's provocation, and that makes it edgier."

Analyzing Historical Components

Every person interviewed for this study spoke about either the historical aspect of journalism or how the field is changing. In many instances, interviewees mentioned both. As noted in the previous section, blogs and the Internet are sending newspapers up the value chain, which by default affects the way magazines are produced. The way objectivity is viewed has also changed in that the front page of major newspapers, to many, is still considered objective news coverage, but to others an identifiable shift is evident. "I think what's considered objective today would have been considered a point of view 20 years ago," Stengel says. And no one really knows what the future holds for print media. It's all guesses and predictions at this point; however, taking a look at the past can provide insight into the future, especially in terms of objectivity and point of view. American journalism in the 18th century was partisan-based. Both newspapers and magazines, when they appeared in the late 1600s and 1700s respectively, were tied to party lines. Magazines, in particular, were launched as vehicles of influence. Wood (1956) writes: "From the beginning the magazine's intent was the widest possible dissemination of important information, a basic intent of today's national magazines. They were founded, too, with the very definite intent of influencing public opinion, particularly one crucial subject. ... The earliest American magazines were out, then, to influence opinion in the Colonies and opinion in England" (p. 12-13).

Objectivity emerged in the 19th century with the introduction of the penny press — six-cent newspapers aimed at wider, less elite audiences. The tradition stuck in the newspaper world and some would say flourished throughout the following century as well. "I spent 23 years at *The New York Times*, and I was taught there, as I'm sure you

were taught in your work at the paper in college, that objectivity or sort of a neutral voice was really one of the great achievements of journalism in the 20th century," Purdum says, adding that opinionated publications were not considered credible or good for society. "Especially from World War II on, the rise of the, some people call it the cult of objectivity, but the rise of the paradigm of objectivity as the norm was seen as a big achievement and something that was really important to the credibility of newspapers and journalism in general. And that was a tool and service for society." According to Purdum, newspaper coverage of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal were high watermarks of objective journalism.

Some magazines such as newsweeklies also abandoned their political ties and subscribed to the paradigm of objectivity. "*Time* for a long time had a very strong point of view," Stengel says. "In the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, the more mainstream tradition of trying to be more purely objective and not to push the scale in one direction or the other or to have a point of view that you give to the reader, I think that came in only sort of post-Luce."

Today, the industry is switching again. Stengel's *Time* promotes point-of-view writing and *Time's* competitor *Newsweek* is in the midst of a makeover as well, working to attract a smaller, more highbrow niche audience with big-name writers and specialized content. An article appearing in *The New York Times* on Feb. 9, 2009, read, "Editorially, Newsweek's plan calls for moving in the direction it was already headed — toward not just analysis and commentary, but an opinionated, prescriptive or offbeat take on events." The new *Newsweek* will theoretically compete with publications such as *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic,* publications that have been rich with point-of-view writing for decades.

To survive, previously objective publications are changing their missions. Some argue that change is what media consumers are demanding. “I think there are a lot of people now in the country who are not only not invested in the old style of objectivity, who actively reject it and think it’s not useful,” Purdum says. “And Mike Kinsley has long said that he thinks it’s possible that American journalism will move steadily toward a more European-style journalism in which there’s a partisan tinge to things. We may be seeing that in sort of the next wave.”

Von Drehle acknowledges a similar shift and attributes it, in part, to the low barrier of entry that exists in journalism today. With the Internet and blogs, starting a journalistic product is not as difficult as it used to be. In many ways, the current situation is similar to the far back climate of the 1800s. “Go back to the 19th century, and look at the communications business, which was mostly dailies and weeklies in those days, and there were a jillion of them,” Von Drehle says, adding that in the 20th century there were around 20 newspapers in New York City. “Not all of them covered the whole period. They’d come into business, go out of business. But there were lots of lots of newspapers in New York.” It would be nearly impossible to accurately quantify the number of journalistic devices in existence today; however, there are a number of similarities between modern media and media of the 19th and 20th centuries. Von Drehle says:

> So what characterized that era is also going to characterize this era, and that’s points of view, partisan positions, ferociously serving the needs of your audience as opposed to trying to reach everybody and appeal to everybody ... being more dramatic, more compelling, more sensational, depending on your audience. Highbrow is going to be higher. Lowbrow is going to be lower because we don’t have this homogenizing of the industry.

What Von Drehle describes is in direct opposition to Mindich's definition of objectivity. In many ways, it even stretches Ward's more realistic take on pragmatic objectivity. Media, in some ways, could actually be departing from the objective-subjective continuum. Purdum says of objective journalism: "The truth is the thing that's hard for people like me and my old bosses at *The New York Times* to remember is that in the great sweep of the history of journalism, that particular model that we all thought of as the norm is really an aberration. It's had a pretty short life." Perhaps the news business is cyclical and, in some ways, returning to its roots.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Point of view has become a survival technique. It's how the journalism industry is evolving, and it's what magazines and newspapers alike are embracing to stay successful in dire circumstances. In a media landscape where scoops are posted instantly on the Internet, the only exclusive content a publication truly possesses is its points of view. The practice naturally has advantages and disadvantages, but it's not needless or thoughtless or without reason. It's a framing technique that incorporates tone, voice and interpretation while being both educational and entertaining and, ultimately, more honest. Point of view also increases credibility by being transparent in practice, which illuminates the most basic journalistic principle of show, don't tell. Essentially, point of view is an older way of doing journalism, more traditionally reminiscent of early foundations, that is being championed in modern practice by some of the greatest writers and editors in the magazine field today.

Magazine research is typically specific and thus segmented as it focuses on one magazine, one niche or one phenomenon. Research involving the overarching practice and concept of point of view is scant if not completely nonexistent. It has never been studied in this basic and preliminary yet completely necessary way. The question that guided this study was, "How and why do U.S. consumer magazine writers and editors establish point of view in their publications?" Beginning to understand the concept of point of view is immensely important for those in the magazine field. Although writers, editors, students, professors and scholars might all have individual ideas of what the concept is, understanding it at a more all-encompassing level is crucial, especially as the field continues to change. For scholars, point-of-view research opens an area of study that

has rarely been touched upon and incorporates several conceptual notions — framing, objectivity, voice and community. For professionals, understanding point of view is practical. Some incorrectly regard point of view as pure opinion and fail to understand the deep level of reporting that goes into this work. These aren't opinion pieces. As practicing journalists start to better understand the technique, magazines as a whole can improve as can credibility and transparency with readers. In understanding other journalists' individual practices, writers can also improve individually.

For this research, framing studies, such as textual analyses, and research that highlights the practice of editors in the field were consulted for bits of information rather than overall guidance. Other research, however, often mentions core characteristics of magazines, including community building. Dating back to the 1800s, Tebbel and Zuckerman (1991) write that magazines were becoming a national medium that reflected all types of people in society. This historical component has survived through the various incarnations of the medium and into the 21st century. While several other aspects have changed, community has remained a clear focus. In acknowledging community, Kitch (2005) references a dialogue among magazines and their audiences. Although Kitch (2005) isn't necessarily explaining a literal dialogue, she is helping to describe the imagined communities magazines form with their readers. Johnson and Prijatel (2007) write, "Because their communities of readers are so well defined and close-knit, magazines are far more comfortable than any other medium in providing opinion and interpretation, and in advocating for the cause of their audiences" (p. 10). This viewpoint was confirmed by the 11 magazine editors and writers interviewed for this study. Providing analysis, interpretation and point of view is just the beginning. Taking community a step further turns point of view into something that is deeply personal for writers, readers and the imagined communities that exist among them.

But point of view never looks the same in two stories or two publications, which is why it is easiest and most educational to view it on a continuum with uniform,

homogenized voice on one end and experimental, individual voices on the other. In deciding where to place the publications in this study, it was effective to view both the magazine's published mission statement in addition to the voice of the publication as viewed through its writers and editors. Voice was often discussed in the mission statement, but the writers and editors interviewed provided rich data to complement the simple and short groupings of sentences that comprise editorial philosophies. *The Washingtonian* represented the most uniform point of view in this study; *Esquire* came in as the most experimental. To effectively place *The New Yorker*, it occupied two slots — "Talk of the Town" represented uniformity while features were more diverse in voice. Newsweeklies (*Time* and *BusinessWeek* in the business sect*)* rank in the middle of the scale by using more traditional journalistic techniques with experimental point-of-view writing. High-end general-interest (*The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and *The Atlantic*) followed and niche (*ESPN* and *Rolling Stone)* were scattered throughout. *New York*, the city magazine analyzed apart from *Washingtonian*, was also on the experimental side of the continuum inhabited by *Rolling Stone* and *Esquire*. Unaffected by a publication's reputation and subject matter, point of view changes more based on target audiences in addition to how experimental the magazine's writers and editors are or are allowed to be. What establishes a publication's point of view is often a top-down process. With Richard Stengel at the helm of *Time*, point of view has been endlessly emphasized. With David Granger at the helm of *Esquire*, the magazine continues to take risks and has become known for out-of-the-ordinary journalistic techniques in terms of writing and design. With Jack Limpert at the helm of *The Washingtonian*, the magazine is heavily edited into a uniform product. Apart from acknowledging the philosophy of a magazine's top editor, understanding a publication's perceived audience will be the best indicator of how homogenized or individualized the work will be. All consumer magazines could fit on this continuum by analyzing mission statements and voice.

It's safe to predict that magazines will continue toward experimental points of view

and smaller, more well-defined audiences. The nation's newsweeklies are prime examples of this trend. *US News & World Report* announced in November 2008 that it would cease weekly publication. *Time* is the lead vocal promoter of point of view. And *Newsweek* is in the midst of an entire transformation aimed at a smaller and more highbrow audience. In some respects, newsweeklies have been hit the hardest when it comes to surviving in the current journalistic climate. The spot they occupied in this landscape just a decade ago has been taken over by the Internet and, to some extent, daily newspapers.

Point of view, however, still distinguishes magazines from newspapers, and it will continue to do so. Although America's newspapers might not ever look like those produced in Europe, many are clearly moving toward analysis and slight point of view as well, albeit in a much more indirect and less transparent manner. Newspapers are still publicly dominated by the relatively modern construct of objectivity despite the fact that the nation's earliest newspapers were launched with partisan ties. Objectivity was eventually considered truer and more honest, but now that mindset isn't as much of a guarantee among news consumers. Modern theories such as Ward's (2006) pragmatic objectivity acknowledge and account for such doubts. Ward (2006) allows for journalistic interpretation with impartiality in newsgathering. Restrained tone, however, is a must, which makes point of view pragmatically not objective. In a magazine piece with strong point-of-view writing, objectivity will exist in the reporting, which will lead to an honest attempt at a solid, interpretive and analytical piece. Point of view does not equal opinion or pure subjectivity, but point of view also fails to rest nicely on the objectivity-subjectivity continuum. According to Junod, objectivity is simply lazy. It might be time to abandon such an archaic measurement altogether because point of view is important for magazines. It's more important than any traditional notion of objectivity.

Point of view is important when it comes to higher truths, but it has also become a money-seeking venture similar to the way that objectivity at one point had profit in mind.

Although penny-press newspapers were cheaper than their predecessors, they were designed to appeal to more people, which would ultimately bring in more money. Now, point of view in some ways is becoming a profit-driven construct as well. Although many magazines have put forth point-of-view writing for decades, others that aren't faring particularly well (*Time* and *Newsweek*) are turning to it to stay afloat. Essentially, to survive, point of view has become necessary. But to have specific and experimental points of view, target audiences must be firmly established. As audiences shrink in size and become more specific, advertising can specialize as well. Communities can also flourish, and readers will hopefully develop imagined connections with certain writers, connections that would keep them coming back. With communities, connections and advertising, there is hope that publications will survive. Acknowledging profit and advertising is a journalistic faux pas among writers and editors on the editorial side. Just as journalists are hesitant to acknowledge that point of view is entertaining, many are not ready to publicly discuss profit.

Point-of-view writing dominates the nation's consumer magazines. It has become an accepted and expected style of writing. In many ways, *The New Yorker* represents, in theory, point of view and a variety of voices. Mentioned unprovoked in nearly every interview, *The New Yorker* is known as a writer's publication. Although *The New Yorker* sits atop the hierarchy of journalistic ideals, it wasn't always talked about in a flattering manner. This could be for a number of reasons. Perhaps writers and editors who haven't had the chance to write for *The New Yorker* would like to and thus talk negatively of a publication they don't have an "in" at. But that seems unlikely in that several interviewees in this study have been published in the magazine and still remain doubtful of its rumored variety. But reputation and credibility keep *The New Yorker* at the top of the field. As long as it continues to do what it does, it will continue to be referenced. In many ways, it's *The New York Times* of the magazine field whether it seeks to be or not. It has won countless awards, employs some of the best writers in the field and has the

ability to publish an unorthodox magazine that contains poetry, fiction and cartoons. Because it is so well-regarded, it will constantly be critiqued.

Just as *The New Yorker* wins National Magazine Awards, point-of-view writing is gaining recognition in the field as well. Tom Junod has received more than 10 National Magazine Award nominations. He has won several and was most recently a finalist for his *Esquire* piece on Steve Jobs. Vanessa Grigoriadis won a National Magazine Award for her piece on Karl Lagerfeld, which was published in *New York*, and Justin Heckert took home the honor of Writer of the Year in the City and Regional Magazine Association's annual contest for heavy point-of-view work conducted at *Atlanta Magazine*. Awards aren't everything, but if this is the work garnering recognition for being the best in the nation, it's worth taking a deeper look into the practice.

Future Research

In interviewing 11 magazine staffers, including writers and editors, a variety of concrete ideas emerged that were elaborated on in this study; however, a number of excellent ideas were also discussed that could not logistically be covered. One of the first things to note is that there were only two women interviewed in this study. There were conscious efforts to make the representation more even, but it was incredibly difficult. Apart from women's magazines and shelter publications, men still continue to dominate the magazine field, and they are often the people advancing experimental point-of-view writing. Taking a deeper look into the number of women who are doing the kind of writing being recognized is a place for further study, and determining why this gap exists is necessary.

There were also generational differences in this study. Many of the younger journalists (Vanessa Grigoriadis, Garrett Graff, David Katz, Justin Heckert) seemed less concerned with objectivity and more concerned with higher truths, entertainment and taking risks. More experienced journalists (Richard Stengel, Todd Purdum, David Von

Drehle) were more aware of the history of the field, objectivity's birth and the problems with relying solely on traditional notions of objectivity to tell a story. They aren't as concerned with being entertaining but acknowledge that entertainment is a byproduct of point of view. A solid example of entertainment is *Time's* green border last April. Looking further into how generational differences at magazines affect the type of content produced is another future avenue for study.

Point of view was also consistently mentioned as a technique that goes beyond the printed word. It stretches into design and overall presentation. Although this was mentioned in the study, it was not elaborated on with any kind of literature-based rationale. Several writers and editors also mentioned how point of view can come through in a variety of ways in the piece. It isn't just the writer's point of view that is worth acknowledging. Often, a piece can be written from a subject's point of view as well.

Using in-depth interviews was a fantastic technique that allowed for open-ended, unrestricted conversations and the expression of a variety of viewpoints. Even with such unstructured techniques, a variety of immensely strong viewpoints emerged, providing legitimacy to a study on a largely unstudied topic. Editors were able to speak more to the establishment of point of view at their publications and the overarching effects of such a practice. Writers spoke more to specific stories and examples of point of view, including advantages and disadvantages. There were also limitations to this study in that making direct comparisons among magazines and interviewees is not as simple with open-ended, in-depth interviews as it could be with structured interviews. But there would be disadvantages with that technique as well in that structured interviews do not allow for any deviation from the mold, which was necessary in every one of the 11 interviews conducted for this study. No two interviews followed the same direct path. Even with limitations, in-depth interviewing was the best method to use for this initial point of view study.

To elaborate on this research, it would be prudent to conduct textual analyses that

focus on points of view advanced by specific writers and publications. In doing so, research could move away from individual opinions and into additional concrete examples. As the medium continues to shift and adapt to the changing media environment, point of view will definitely be a concept and practice to watch.

Appendix

Interview Transcripts

John Byrne, Executive Editor of *BusinessWeek*

January 14, 2009
11 a.m. via phone
1 hour

Can you tell me a little bit about your background in journalism?

I went to Mizzou for a master's back in the mid-70s. I was actually in the Washington program. I went direct from my undergraduate degree, which was in English and political science. I loved Washington so much that I wanted to say there. So I hooked up with a group of trade newspapers called Fairchild Publications. They had about a dozen different trade publications. I worked with them in Washington for about two and a half years. Then I became London bureau chief. Then after about two and a half years, I joined *Forbes* in New York as a writer. I was at *Forbes* for four years and then was recruited by *BusinessWeek*. I was management editor here, covering management-leadership strategy, business schools, executive compensation, corporate governance, things like that. And I did that for 17 and a half years. During that time I wrote 57 cover stories, the most ever by anyone in the history of the magazine. And then I left to become editor-in-chief of a monthly magazine called *Fast Company*. I took over from the two founders, who were leaving, and ran the magazine for about two and a half years. And then it was sold by the owners. I helped recruit a buyer to keep it alive. And then I was invited back to *BusinessWeek* as executive editor of the magazine, which basically is a job that is the top editorial job with day-to-day responsibility for the magazine itself. The executive editor refers to the editor-in-chief who oversees the entire brand, including the online side, the magazine, other businesses as well. I did that for about two years, and then I was asked to take over the online operation. So for the past two years, I've been running our online business. I've also co-authored eight different books. Nonfiction.

I have two titles. One is Executive Editor of *BusinessWeek*. The other title is Editor-in-Chief of BusinessWeek.com.

Came back to *BusinessWeek* in August four years ago.

How would you describe point of view?

I would say that it is an essential piece of framing your journalism for an audience. And this has changed over the years. Some of the differentiation between a

newspaper and a magazine used to be differentiation around point of view. So in other words, you got your daily news in a newspaper. Now we're talking about the old days. Now the magazine format for a newsweekly … The magazine took the best, most important news from that week (*Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report* and us in the business world) and then put judgment on it and a little more forward spin. Point of view in that sense is used as a differentiator between mediums. Because it really differentiated the magazine business over the newspaper business. What's happened is newspapers have had to move up the value chain. So moving up the value chain, newspapers began to and now clearly they do what newsweeklies had done 10 years ago. They can provide point of view in a newspaper and an analysis. And all the good papers do on a daily basis. They can do in 24 hours what used to take a week. Now the difference is that magazines have to have far more original content that may or may not backbeat off the news. Point of view tends to be a little bit sharper as a result of this move up the value chain by newspapers and online sites.

What do you mean by sharper exactly?

In general, this is not necessarily true here, and I'll explain why because there is a certain way we do point of view that is probably somewhat different than what a lot of other magazines do. In general, a lot of magazines try to be far more provocative. There's a need to do point of view in a way that actually is revealing. It's revealing in a sense that it challenges the way you think about a certain topic or person or organization. There's provocation, and that makes it edgier. For years, for example, the place where I came from, *Forbes,* to come to *BusinessWeek*, was a far more provocative magazine than it is today. And that point of view meaning ... the whole raison d'être of the magazine *Forbes* in the days where Malcom Forbes was in charge of it was that "we tell it like it is." So the point of view there was, "we are an all knowing smart person. And we've studied this, and we're going to tell you exactly what it's like, exactly what we think." And incidentally, the alternative point of view is almost shrugged away in the story to strengthen and make sharper the point of view. And that was *Forbes'* formula, and that became the personality of the magazine. Because every magazine should really have a personality. So if you can imagine *Forbes* sitting at your dinner table, this would be the person who would be throwing the bombs. This would be the person who would make the conversation incredibly lively and provocative, often by taking stands that frankly and certainly weren't in the consensus. And in fact, purposely being contrarian because that was also a part of the *Forbes* formula. Now this has weakened over the years and is less true today. And incidentally, the magazine isn't nearly as good.

It's really different from *BusinessWeek,* where we really want to be fair to people. Instead of sharply saying this is what we think and then literally dismissing the counter-argument in the story, which is what *Forbes* formula was, here there's a sense or obligation to be fair. Of course there's a point of view in pretty much all the stories, but we often give a significant amount of space in the story to an opposing point of view. So you kind of see the two sides even though we're providing point of view on what we think is sort of the right way to look at a given subject. And believe me, at *Forbe*s, when I said it was really shrugged off, the alternative point of view, I mean in one line it was immediately dismissed, and then you were on to your argument. There was no more

discussion about the alternative point of view. It was almost like a slap in the face of the alternative argument. It was like, "Can you believe that some people think this?" That kind of attitude.

And now Forbes has softened?

I think it's been severely diluted. There was a famous editor-in-chief of *Forbes*. His name was Jim Michaels, who has since died, who basically was the voice of that magazine. And everything that ran in it, ran through this hands. And he put these really sharp observations in those stories and gave the magazine a distinct personality. I think point of view, in many cases, is essential to a magazine's persona in the market place and differentiation. I think magazines are different creatures than obviously newspapers, and they need a persona by and large. Our persona is that we want to be the trusted adviser to the global business professional. And our point of view, which should pervade almost every story, is we're making important choices about what we put in the magazine because we think it's important to you as a reader but always because we're your trusted adviser. The point of view in the stories, more often than not, isn't really sharp because we respect alternative points of view that we give a fair amount of airtime to. So that's sort of where we are. If we're at the dinner table, we're not throwing bombs, we're the more reasonable person at the dinner table who can cite and respect the other side while still giving you an opinion. We wouldn't nearly be as provocative.

But you're still coming to an overall conclusion?

Yes. And I think the conclusions we come to today incidentally are sharper than the conclusions we came to 10, 20 years ago, as this value chain has moved. And different mediums and players in it have had to move up the chain.

Is the magazine's point of view individualized or uniform?

I think there are certain individuals who are personalities of the magazines whose point of view clearly reflects who they are as opposed to what the magazine is. Mike Mandel, our economics guy. He's a very creative economist, and he will write very creatively about the world of economics and often with a lot of opinion. What he does is quite different from what the entire tone of the magazine might be. And that might be true with Jack Welch, who writes a column with opinion and clearly with point of view. Or Jon Fine, a columnist here who writes on media, and has a sharper point of view than would often exist in most of the magazine. So I think we have both. I think there's a general tone in the magazine that point of view is an important part of that reinforces the notion that we're really fair, respect both sides and want to be your trusted adviser. And then there are more sharper things by Mandel, our economist, or Jon Fine, the media guy, or even in some cases Jack Welch that are probably a bit sharper than the general tone of the magazine.

How is point of view finessed toward your target audience?

That's a good question because if I'm defining us as the trusted business adviser to the global business professional, what we want to do is we don't want to take outrageous stands. We don't want to take highly provocative positions. We want to come

across as very reasonable because that's part of the whole getting the trust and the respect of your reader for us. So the point of view should reinforce all of that. That we're essentially, we have a forward perspective, and we provide useful insights that inspire our audience, help them turn ideas into action. Our focus is on essential business. We're trying to provide a competitive advantage to our readers by giving them information that we think will help them make smarter decisions in their business careers or investments. We're totally their trusted adviser, and we do that through point of view that is not extreme, not unfair to any party even though of course the party that's not going to agree with me might consider it unfair, but it's not visibly or blatantly unfair as it is in many other publications that have a different personality.

Is that direction and that objective addressed in your mission statement?

Yes. We have a mission statement that we basically say explicitly, "We are their trusted adviser." We refer to our users. Both readers of the print product as well as online. It explicitly says, "We want to be their trusted adviser."

How is point of view discussed at the publication?

It's discussed at the level where the editor meets writer. And the editors are making sure that stories are fair and that the point of view expressed is reasonable, legitimate and logical. That it's not way off the mark. Then at a more senior level, when our copy moves up the system through the editor-in-chief, the executive editor, the assistant managing editors, they're all looking at this for point of view and making sure that we're not purposely provocative for the sake of being provocative, and we're not unfair to a person or a company or an organization. I think most of these discussions really occur between editor and writer.

How do you help someone who's taking a point of view that isn't going to mesh with the publication? How do you work with that writer?

Well it's simple really. You just rewrite their copy. It's more than that. You immediately give them feedback, and after the feedback if their change isn't made, as an editor, you edit that stuff out of it. You may even edit some more point of view inside the copy. It depends on how much experience a writer has. The other important thing about point of view is the more experience you have, the easier it is. The less experience you have as a journalist, the less comfortable you are bringing a point of view to a story. And you're really uncomfortable making really sharp decisions unless you know the subject inside out and you have the kind of confidence to write that way. Sometimes editors have to impose a stronger, clearer point of view on a piece than a writer may be willing to impose himself. So sometimes it's cutting it back because it's too sharp, sometimes it's bringing it up because it's too little or it's too low. And that's all part of the process of creating the personality of what the magazine is.

What are the advantages to using point of view in a story?

I really think that magazines have to have a persona. They have to have an image. People have to have a relationship with them. So point of view helps establish the relationship. It's beyond utility. At base level, the utility of a given publication is all

about providing information that is helpful or useful to you or entertaining to you. In our case, it can help you in your career; it can help you make decisions; it can make you the smartest person in the room; it can help you invest in the markets or in different investment instruments. That's base utility that every publication has to have on one level or another. I think a well-crafted magazine has the added burden or asset of having a persona that makes one closer to the publication above and beyond the utility. If we really deliver on this notion of trusted adviser, it really is true, the magazine's persona. And there's no stronger indication of that persona than the point of view you bring. Some of the point of view, incidentally, isn't necessarily written because you express point of view through design, through photography, through illustrations. Do they shout at you? Are they subtle? Think of design as the clothes that a person might wear and what those clothes immediately convey about him or her to other people. You're sending messages all the time. So part of the point of view is actually even expressed through the design of the magazine.

What are the disadvantages to using point of view in a story?

The clearest disadvantage to point of view is that if it's not used properly, people are going to essentially assume that you have a bias. And for a magazine like *Parents,* that's not a good thing, for other magazines it is a good thing. For political magazines that lean right or left, you want to have a bias. In that case, your point of view really defines your magazine, and it's far more important than even your utility. For us, as more for a traditional journalistic product, we don't want people to think we have an ax to grind. But point of view, depending on how it's used, can make people think that you're not fair, you're not open to new and different ideas, you have an ax to grind, you're propagating a specific ideology or point of view consistently. And for some magazines, that's really good and important. For us, not.

So there really is a fine line?

I think there is. I think also that if we ran a story that was highly provocative, it probably would feel out of place for our readers. We're taking stands on everything, and they're not so subtle stands, but they're not poke-you-in-the-eye stands.

Is point of view in conflict with objectivity?

Not at all. A reporter has to be objective when they are doing the reporting, but once the reporting is done... There are basically three elements to the job. There's reporting; there's writing; there's critical thinking. When you go into a situation, even if you go into it with a particular belief, a thesis as you have, you may be listening really hard to the things people say that support your thesis, but you should be listening equally hard to things they say that are in fact not supportive of your thesis. And that's where objectivity is important. And in straight news, objectivity is important. I actually think that particularly in magazine journalism, which should be more explanatory, more interpretive, more analytical, I actually think that reporters owe their readership a point of view because you've spent so much time reporting a story, and you are an expert in the field. Around here we have people who just do nothing except cover economics, or nothing except cover the stock market, or mergers and acquisitions, or private equity or

general electric or marketing or management. So their deep level of expertise, their sourcing over years of experience and the amount of reporting they do on any given story should also be used to bring point of view to their reader because there's more value in that. I don't want those people to be objective in the sense that they're writing a story with no point of view at all. That doesn't bring value to the reader. In fact, I think that's cheap. I want them to be objective during the reporting. I don't want them to be objective when they sit down and they critically think about the material that they've gathered, and then they shape and fashion it to be a story with a point of view. That's what we need to do.

How does point of view affect credibility?

I think it helps credibility as long as it's fair and reasonable. When it becomes an attack on an idea or a person or an organization, when it becomes a poke-in-the-eye kind of point of view, when it is provocative just for the sake of being provocative to inflame others just to get a reaction, I think that's when it hurts your credibility. It doesn't hurt your credibility when you're presenting the other side, and when you're doing this not in high-voltage language that is inflammatory.

How does BusinessWeek's point of view influence story selection and other large-scale decisions?

All ideas are perishable, and very few ideas are really new. Point of view often will get involved in a decision over what to run and what not to run because let's say a competing publication (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Barrons*, Street.com, *Lovely Fool*, any of these) runs a story that we've been working on, if they have a point of view that significantly differs from ours, we will probably still run our story. If in fact their point of view is pretty much what we would have written and run, we'll probably spike the story because we don't think there's any value added. In this case, what I'm saying is that point of view actually is considered a value added proposition that literally determines whether or not you would run a story in case of competition from a rival. So that's where it influences story selection. And even when people are pitching a story, and they're looking competitively at what has been done on that topic over the last year or two, you're shaping your idea in the context of what others have already done and what people know to make sure that it has more value. This is where point of view becomes really important because not in every case have things changed to the degree that might warrant a brand new story on something, so it could be that point of view is a differentiator as opposed to "hey this company is doing something new, or this person is doing something different or important, we need to do a story on it." It might just be point of view is a reason for the story in itself.

We recently ran a story, for example, on has Silicon Valley lost its mojo? Obviously, that's totally a point of view story. If we just did a story on Silicon Valley, there'd be no real story there. The whole idea for the story came from a thought by a senior writer here that you know what, if you look at what has been innovated by Silicon Valley over the last five, 10 years, it's shockingly little. And then asking the question why is that so. And then going out to Silicon Valley and doing essentially a road trip and interviewing key people in the valley about this topic from Andy Grove, former chairman

and CEO of Intel, to different CEOs of start-ups and laboratories and RND facilities out there. So that whole story was all about point of view, and the point of view is that Silicon Valley has lost its mojo, and here's why, and here's what people are saying about it, and here's what they need to get it back. Without that point of view, it wouldn't be a story. The point of view actually created the story and was essential to it.

How does it stay at point of view without turning completely into an opinion piece?

I think by and large by offering some counterbalancing paragraphs in the story. Where in a column, you probably want a sharper point of view than you would in a traditional story in a magazine. And so in a column you might give a lot less attention to the alternative point of view. Although in our magazine, we still give some.

Are there magazines and media outlets that you look to for inspiration when it comes to point of view, voice and tone?

I wouldn't say that there is. I read other magazines for other reasons, not to inspire me about point of view.

What does your point of view try not to do?

We try not to scream; we try not to be hysterical; we're very calm. We're the smart person in the room who doesn't get emotionally involved in our opinions. So it's very reasoned, and it's not over the top. It's not volatile. We wouldn't shock you where there are people who do nothing but shock. There are people who scream all the time. There are people who are highly emotional about their opinions. That's not who we are.

Are there types of stories that point of view works better for than others?

Yeah, I'd say, columns. Columns have far stronger points of view than traditional stuff, but that's pretty much it.

How is the point of view of your print publication different from the online product?

It's pretty much the same. In part it's the same because the same people who have been trained in the culture work in both places pretty much. We have a small separate staff for online, but most of the journalism that's appearing online, with the exception of columns, is written by magazine staff.

How do you distinguish the point of view of BusinessWeek with those available on blogs and other online media outlets?

I think we're a trusted adviser. A lot of blogs will be much more provocative. Some blogs are very provocative. Some are just dull and bland. We're trying to provide useful insights. We're trying to provide ideas that people can turn into action. We're about doing a central business focus. We're about helping our readers make smarter decisions. That trusted adviser thing is really the personality of what we're doing. I don't know that a lot of blogs do that. There are so many blogs that do everything. Some will come off as reasonable just as we would. Some will come off as hysterical. Some are just bland and boring and repeat what they've read somewhere else. I think it's all over the map.

What am I missing?

I think point of view has gotten some publications into trouble or has created controversy. When I think about, well it's a competitive advantage incidentally because let's face it, to me, if I were doing what you're doing, I would say the best examples where point of view has led significant competitive advantage with a media outlet, I would say Fox is No. 1 because they purposely went out to create a conservative, right-wing approach to covering the news. And they were really the first to ever do this. And they did it primarily because every public poll out there has shown that the public believes that the media has a liberal bias. So if you're starting something new, you don't do the same thing, you do something different. This is all about business really. You get competitive advantage by doing something differently. You have no competitive advantage by just doing what everyone else does. So Fox and Roger Ales went out there and said frankly, we're going to be the right-wing news network. And it's been a huge success primarily because of point of view. Yeah, OK, they hire a very attractive anchor. And they do certain types of news that other people might laugh at. But the fact of the matter is point of view is the only reason. Their point of view is the reason they have succeeded. Period. And if you look at *The New York Times*, *The New York Times* is widely regarded as a highly liberal paper, and it's continually attacked by the conservatives. And if you go out and you look at what people say about *The New York Times*, the venom directed toward what arguably is the greatest newspaper we have in America, is unbelievable. To me, I'd say that's a disadvantage to the *Times*. I don't think it's an advantage because there's a high percentage of people who shockingly have little or no respect for *The New York Times* as great as it is because it's perceived to be so liberal. In the case of Fox, tremendous advantage and responsible for its entire success. In the case of *The New York Times*, I think it has hurt its credibility.

Lauren Collins, *The New Yorker* Staff Writer

January 27, 2009
10 a.m. at *The New Yorker*
30 minutes

What is your journalism background?

I worked at *Vogue* for a year before I worked here. They're obviously within the same company. I just transferred over. Started as an editorial assistant.

What have your positions been at The New Yorker?

I was an editorial assistant here, and then I basically continued to be an editorial assistant but what's called an assistant editor. Then I was the deputy editor for Talk of the Town. And now I'm a staff writer.

As the deputy editor for Talk of the Town, what does your job consist of?

A little bit of everything. Fielding pitches. Reading submissions. Editing, coordinating, fact checking, copyediting, closing the section. Susan Morrison is the editor

of the section, and I started as her assistant. We just kind of did the section together essentially.

As a staff writer, what do you primarily work on?

A little bit of everything. The pieces I have in the works ... I'm doing one thing about a romance novelist, another thing about a guy who climbs buildings who's like the human Spiderman and another thing about Kanye West. So you can see that I don't have a beat exactly.

In your own words, how would you describe point of view?

I don't know. I'm a little unsure. We have the dictionary definition obviously, which I would assume would be the perspective from which a story is told. I'm going to go with that.

Is that a term that was used at Vogue and is used here to guide writers?

I think there might be a section in *Vogue* called point of view actually. No, it's not one I hear thrown around a lot. I think of point of view as maybe more commonly associated with fiction writing.

Now taking the long-form narrative that is so often present in your work, you really used it in your Michelle Obama piece, your Banksy piece and what not. Would you say the fiction technique of point of view is something you have used in that kind of writing?

I think that I always write in a third-person sort of limited point of view. Maybe occasionally it veers into ... I'm not sure. I'd have to analyze my own work. Maybe occasionally there's a little bit of a more omniscient point of view. I mean I think a piece that's interesting is the Caroline Kennedy one we ran this week. Larissa MacFarquhar wrote it. I think there were some moments there where she kind of got inside Caroline Kennedy's head. I'm not sure if or when I do that. I'd have to go back and read.

What is your writing process like in terms of how you're going to sculpt an article?

Obviously the first thing you do is get the assignment and have a conversation with your editor because there's always some sort of agreement not just on what you want the piece to be but how it can also serve the magazine's purposes. I mean whether the aim of it is to break news or be a career retrospective, a process piece or whatever. What I like to do is cram, try to do all my reading, hopefully before I meet the person. There are a few months of doing a lot of reading and reporting. I like to have an initial meeting with the person. Usually I'll start calling around later. It all depends on what kind of relationship you have with the subject, if it's more adversarial or if it's totally cooperative. But then once I've got all the reporting done, I usually ... it's not very exciting ... kind of just an extended version of writing a term paper or something. I usually just go through all my notes and find chunks I want to use and kind of consolidate those, eventually come up with some sort of outline and sit down and grind it out for a while.

How do you determine what tone and what voice you're going to use throughout?

I don't think it's necessarily a conscious decision. Let me qualify that by saying it's certainly a conscious decision, but it's not one decision. I don't think you sit down before you write a piece and say, "The tone of this article will be adoring," or "The tone of this article will be mocking" or "The tone of this article..." I think you're making hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of little choices as you go through. But ultimately it's an outgrowth of what you feel about your subject and what you're trying to convey to the reader about it.

How does The New Yorker use tone?

At least as you're getting started, there's more of a house tone, particularly with Talk of the Town. A wry tone. Another interesting thing is that tone has really changed over the years. Years ago in Talk, for instance, they used the *we* and that sort of thing. I think bylines were instituted in Talk when Tina Brown was editor. Of course with bylines I think there are a multiplicity of voices. Another thing to remember is with *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* a lot of the writers are writing books, too. They bring an audience with them to the magazine when people actually are paying to read Malcom Gladwell. Obviously voice comes from there.

Do you think tone, voice and, ultimately, an end point of view is targeted at a certain demographic and a certain audience?

I think the first thing you learn when you're writing is purpose and audience. I think a Cosmo writer is writing for a certain audience, too. It's just a different audience. I think all writers are using tone and voice; it just depends on targeting it to your demographic.

How does The New Yorker describe its target demographic?

You'd have to ask the business side. I don't really know. I can't give you the right answer.

Do you know what the mission statement is?

No. I would just describe it as people who like to read interesting things, I would hope. That would be the writer's kind of blurb.

When you were editing Talk of the Town, say you have someone who is struggling a bit with tone and voice, or if you're struggling with tone and voice, how do your editors help guide you?

I think a lot of times tone and voice as opposed to the structure of the piece, a lot of that can be done in line editing. If there are a few too many adjectives that start to sound gratuitously harsh. I think a lot of that can come in the actual phase of editing. The kind of red-pen stuff is really effective with tone and voice. Adjusting something a few degrees can make a big difference.

I find it difficult to isolate this idea of point of view or tone or voice from the overall kind of collaborative process that you go through in a piece. Yeah, certainly, someone might say "This sounds a little much," or "Maybe dial it up a notch here or

there." But that's so embedded in the whole process of editing that I don't know that it's necessarily such a conscious decision.

Perhaps another way to talk about it is, when you get an assignment from an editor, is it really just a large topic?

Yeah, pretty much. It's not like, hey, hatchet job on so and so coming right up. Or let's run a really great piece about so and so that will help her sell a lot of albums. I feel lucky about working here in that I do feel a lot of freedom to go out and find what the story is and learn and immerse myself in it. I would be wary of having too much of an idea of what the story is before you've spoken a word to the person involved.

Is the analysis you provide in conflict with objectivity?

If we're talking about writing profiles, which I write a lot of, I think it's really important to give someone a fair shake. That's what I was kind of saying about not having your mind made up. Objectivity, that's hard. Obviously we all bring something to the table. I think it's disingenuous to pretend that we don't. So let's say you're writing about someone who's a huge pain in the ass and never returns your calls and makes you wait two hours in the rain, and maybe you're personally annoyed or wounded. I don't think that should really find its way into the piece other than this person made me wait two hours. You can decide if you're going to make that kind of point. But you can't decide that because you didn't like the person that he or she isn't a great actor.

If you were going to go back to the standard definition of objectivity with having to have both sides of the story, is that something you think about when writing?

Yeah, I think that's important. Of course you want to find out in any situation who are the pros and the cons or who are the admirers and the detractors. I think what's important is that you hear everyone out. You want to hear the full spectrum. And then where your discernment comes in is deciding who's telling you the truth or who's right and who's wrong. I think it's really important to seek out the opposition factions, and then you have to kind of negotiate and decide.

How would you describe that process? Is that a more difficult part?

I think it depends. It totally depends on the case. I think you do more and more research, and you talk to more and more people, and you get to the point where you're hearing the same things over and over again. You then have to look at the facts.

What do you try not to do with your tone, voice and point of view?

I always like the old axiom about afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. No. That's not to say there's a double standard for different kinds of people. The one thing I try not to do is kick someone when they're down. If the person did something horrible, then maybe you do. There's an exception to every rule. Maybe just kind of taking a sneering tone toward someone who maybe, for one reason or another, deserves a little more generosity I would try to stay away from.

So it comes down to how you're going to treat your subjects?

Yeah, maybe a reflexively sneering tone isn't always the greatest.

Are there any media outlets and magazines that you read for inspiration?

Yeah, everything I can get my hands on, not to give you the Sarah Palin answer. But I mean look at my office. It's full of magazines and books. I read the (*New York) Post* every day. I read everything I can get my hands on. I love magazines. That's why I work in them.

Do you think you have a distinct tone and voice in your work?

I mean I hope so. I think that's every writer's aspiration, but I don't really know what it is. I don't have a set of three adjectives that I would like my tone to be described by.

But you do think it exists?

I don't know ... just through feedback of people who've said, "Oh I knew you wrote that story before I got to the end of it."

Do you think that's something that develops over time? Is it easy to get there?

I don't know about that question. I'm really not sure. I do think, as you get a little further along, if anything you have more confidence and freedom in terms of an editor is going to let John McPhee get away with something interesting. It's kind of that whole thing of once you've mastered the rules, then you can break them.

How long does it take you to report a story?

Awhile. It usually varies. A few months.

How do you think tone, voice and point of view affect credibility?

I think the main thing is you can read something that can be positive or negative, but if it seems like you're taking cheap shots, you want to avoid that. You want your criticisms to be merited as much as you want your praise to be merited. The main thing is having done enough reporting to back up your critical viewpoint with examples and facts. If you're saying this person is really impatient ... So much better than saying that is to have a scene that demonstrates that. You need to have some kind of evidence for what your saying.

How does story selection come in here?

It's always kind of a mix. You have the great, really interesting, strange New York stories. We love to have something newsy. Do we want something cultural? Did we just do something on Central Park fauna and flora? It depends on how things go together. That's kind of difficult to define.

Is there a distinguished editorial mix of the magazine?

I'm not as involved in that. I wouldn't imagine there's a quota but more of the overall feel. Is there something for everyone?

Is there anything I'm missing?

I don't think so. My kind of overall take on this ... I feel like my answers are a little vague. It's not that I don't think it's important, for me it's just so difficult to isolate the element. It's just such a part, it just seems like something that you're at least ... I think every little word choice has something to do with tone. I don't think you set it out for yourself before writing something.

When you start working for The New Yorker, how are you guided?

If you get an assignment for a Talk piece, it's go write it and show me what you have, and we'll sit down and figure out which parts sag. It's the same process as any piece of writing. There's not some sort of tone indoctrination camp or something.

Garrett Graff, Editor-at-Large for *The Washingtonian*

February 25, 2009
5 p.m. at *The Washingtonian* in Washington, D.C.
45 minutes

Can you tell me a bit about your background in journalism?

I come from a generation of print journalists. My father spent his entire career with the Associated Press. His father spent most of his career with the *New York Herald Tribune* but actually started as a cops reporter in Pennsylvania in the 1930s. So sort of journalism is what my family does. My mother is a historian and author but actually edited *Vermont Life*, which is Vermont's city magazine. So this is sort of what we do. My sister is a marine biologist, and we consider her adopted.

So how did you get from Harvard to here?

I started after college on Howard Dean's presidential campaign, where I did press. Deputy National Spokesperson. Ended up after that in Washington as cofounder of an Internet strategy firm called Echo Ditto, where I did blogging and social media. That led me to writing my own blog, which was called Fishbowl DC, which covers media and journalism in Washington. That got me freelancing for *Washingtonian*, and in August 2005, I was offered, out of the blue, my current position at *Washingtonian*. I accepted on the spot and have been here ever since.

And that is Editor-at-Large, right?

Editor-at-Large.

And what does that entail?

Editor-at-large for *Washingtonian* means something different than it does for most other magazines. I work out of the office full time and am actively involved in the office and the magazine. My specific responsibilities when I started were editing the Capital Comment, front-of-the-book section and writing long-form features on politics and

media. Since I started, I also added to that list the chance to run the Internet division, which is something that we actually didn't have when I started here.

How would you describe this concept of point of view in your own words?

What I'm interpreting your interest in it is from what perspective does a magazine approach what it covers?

Yes. From what perspective does it approach it, and how that is executed in terms of voice and tone.

So I think the difference between a good magazine and a great magazine is the ability to define a unifying characteristic of design, tone, voice and subject matter. The two magazines that do this the best are *Texas Monthly*, edited by Evan Smith, and *New York Magazine*, edited by Adam Moss. *New York Magazine*, I think, is hands down the best magazine in the world right now. So *Texas Monthly*, for instance, the unifying theme of Texas and *Texas Monthly* is big. So everything about the magazine reflects that. The subjects that they choose, the fonts that they choose, the pictures that the choose, the typography, the writing, the verbs that they use, sort of have that up and down as a unifying characteristic of here's how we view Texas, and here's how we view big. *New York* is able to do it, I think, sort of around ... It's a little bit more nebulous to me. It's like pornography; you know it when you see it as Justice Potter Stewart says. It's sort of like fame and celebrity is the unifying characteristic of *New York Magazine*. Sort of everything they cover falls into those categories, even the things that don't immediately appear to be focused on fame or celebrity. I think if you sort of dive into it, it sort of comes up in that world. You can sort of figure it out through that.

At Washingtonian, what would be the point of view? What's the unifying characteristic?

I don't think we do it as well at *Washingtonian* as we could. I think the unifying characteristic of Washington is explaining how the city operates, which is helping people live, work and play here. Everything that we do is in some way geared toward helping our readers understand how this city operates. The most recent issue, we have pieces on nightlife that we hope explains something about how people here relax. There's a piece about ambulances and the 911 system in Washington to give you some sense of how the city works. And those types of things. The thing is that we have a breakdown in the magazine between the content and the voice and the design and the voice. We are not as good as a *Texas Monthly* or a *New York Magazine* about sort of mirroring the image and the feeling of the magazine with the approach of the content. If that makes sense.

How would you describe the voice of the magazine?

Are you drawing a distinction here between point of view and voice?

I'm looking at voice as a characteristic of point of view.

The writing in the magazine in which I interpret as sort of the voice is ... I'm trying to figure out what the right word is ... It's edited very carefully to ensure sort of an even-handed, middle-of-the-road approach. It's not as snarky as other magazines. It's not as formal as other magazines. It's written for a mass audience who has a wide range of

ages. I think the voice of the magazine is that we try to make it such that there aren't too many people who pick it up and say this magazine wasn't written for me.

So it's not targeted at a specific demographic? It's anyone in Washington?

Right.

In your writing and your features such as the piece about the FBI, how do you use point of view?

One of the key magazine tips that I got at one point is that magazines don't cover fires; they sift through the ashes. I think that's what a magazine like *Washingtonian* can do, which is that we're able to do — take really long, in-depth views of people, of situations, of institutions, and then I think that one of the things that comes out of that is this very balanced, very even-handed, sort of middle-of-the-road approach, where there's not, there's not a ton of, you don't see in *Washingtonian* sort of hatchet jobs. And part of that I think is when you take time to understand someone, when you take time to understand an institution, there are remarkably few purely evil people or institutions out there. I think if you do a good job reporting out a piece, reporting out a profile, reporting out an investigation of an institution, you will end up somewhere in the middle by virtue of the fact that most people have good intentions. Most people have reasons for the choices that they make, and if you take the time to explain them and understand them, I think it becomes very hard to vilify people in the way that is commonplace in a lot of magazines these days.

So it sounds like there's really an explanatory property that is underneath everything.

Yes.

What would you say are the advantages to taking a point of view?

It defines your audience. It defines the people who are interested in what you're doing and what they're reading in your magazine. It gives them a sense of personal identity. I think that it's clear through all of the market research that's been taking place over the last couple of years that magazines are very closely identified with personal identity. It's why when you go to someone's house, they have magazines sitting on the coffee table. You can walk into someone's house. If I tell you that I am an *Atlantic* subscriber, a *New Yorker* subscriber, an *Esquire* subscriber and a *New York Magazine* subscriber, you know an awful lot about me. If I tell you I subscribe to *Us Weekly*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Redbook*, then you know different things about me. They may or may not be true, but magazines are a case where you can judge people pretty well based on what they read, which is not the case with newspapers. Newspapers are mass-market publications that are read by sort of everyone in a given locality regardless of demographics or age or employment. That's not entirely true. In some cities you have blue-collar papers and white-collar papers. *New York Times*, *New York Post*. *Boston Herald*, *Boston Globe*. But at the same time, those are papers designed for very large mass audiences. And that's not true of magazines. Magazines through their point of view define who the people are who will be interested.

So really defining a community?

Yes.

What are the disadvantages?

Well the disadvantages are that you turn people off. But that's a very strong plus and minus because a lot of carving out an audience niche is turning off the right, or in this case, the wrong people. A lot of magazines devote a lot of time to figuring out content that will turn off the people who are not in their desired demographic. So I think that you sort of have that immediately clear.

In your writing and your editing with Capital Comment, what do you try not to do with your point of view?

Jack (Limpert) and I were actually talking about this today. Any time you get into a situation where you're writing in anything published, *we or us*, that is a situation for pratfalls. *The Washington Post* Style section writes in the *we* and *us* and talks about how we feel about a given event, how we are all reacting to the death of this person or this seminal historic event. And most of the time, I read that, actually no, I'm not. That's not how I'm feeling. That's not the situation that I find myself in. And I think that that's a real challenge for publications is to define a we without necessarily saying we.

How does credibility come into play? Does it bolster? Does it hurt it?

Point of view is incredibly important for readers from a credibility standpoint for two reasons. One is, again going back to the question of defining them and you and us, that you need to have the credibility that point of view gives. If you are writing a hipster magazine, you need to display enough of a knowledge of hipsterdom and hipster culture and hipster writing in order to establish your credibility with your readers.

For instance, Rick Stengel of Time, talks about point of view. What he has said is that once you've done all your reporting and you feel confident, then and only then can you take a point of view in your writing. Is that the kind of approach you take here at Washingtonian?

I think that that's the difference between newspaper writing and magazine writing is that magazines you're supposed to understand a subject fully enough that you know what to say about it. Whereas newspapers, there's a higher degree of uncertainty and real-time fact gathering that you may not necessarily know what you're talking about. I think that's an important insight. When I write, I will report for months, and then I will basically sit down and write a piece in a weekend, hardly looking at notes at all. I think my style is that I've reached a point where I've internalized enough and thought through a piece enough that I can just sit down and blast through it.

So you become a mini-expert?

Yes. And then you probably move on to something else and forget everything you knew about it.

Do you think that point of view and objectivity are in conflict?

No, I think they can be very complementary. I think the difference is that we view, in journalism, objectivity as this false construct where there is no truth, that it's more of a ... It's less objective and more sort of moral relativism. You end up with these he said, she said, who knows articles where you put one person saying global warming exists, you quote one person saying global warming doesn't exist, and then you've done your job. You've been objective. Whereas I think the value of point of view, the value of fairness is that you can to the best of your ability understand a subject while you're writing about it, know how to judge it but also by understanding it, understand enough to not judge it more harshly than it deserves to be judged. My personal standard for instance in writing profiles is whether I would be willing to sit across the table from my profilee as he or she reads the piece, which doesn't mean that I can't be harsh. But would I be willing to say the things to their face that I'm saying in print? If I'm not willing to sit there and say it to their face, I'm not going to say it in print. That doesn't mean I can't have a point of view. That just means I have to be able to justify my point of view.

And all the facts though are going to be there and be correct, so that's how objectivity comes in.

Yes.

With Washingtonian, you have a pretty decent editorial mix. Would you say it goes more toward uniform point of view, uniform voice, or is it more individualized?

No, I think *Washingtonian* has one of the most uniform voices in magazines because Jack (Limpert), the editor, has a very specific editing style. And by virtue of him editing all the pieces they end up with a very uniform voice.

What are the advantages to that?

The advantage to that is you have a very set voice that follows the reader through the magazine. There's nothing jarring from article to article in terms of change or voice or point of view. The disadvantage of that is that a lot of the individuality of a writer disappears in that process.

So it can definitely help with flow though?

Yes.

What about blogs? How do blogs that are all voice affect the point of view that's taken in magazines and the necessity for it? Does it?

Yes, of course it affects it. The longer answer is magazines have much longer had a point of view. They've much longer had a stronger voice. Where it's really changing in the industry is in newspapers that have been very purposely lacking in point of view and lacking in voice. The AP is the definition of just the facts, Jack Webb style writing. That type of writing, I think, is going to suffer in the age of waterdom.

Have you seen that kind of writing start to change?

Oh yeah. I think you see it in the rise of snark in everything.

Have you seen David Denby's new book?

Yeah I heard terrible things about it, so I didn't read it. You know, and snark is cheap humor, and it's easy, and it works. And it's funny. But it's not I don't think a long-term sustainable voice.

Do you think there are stories that point of view works better for than others?

Yeah, of course there are stories that it works better on than others.

In an editorial mix of say Washingtonian, where would you find the most point of view and the most voice?

I think you would find the most voice in personal profiles and investigative pieces.

So long-form narrative that can use those storytelling techniques?

Yes. I don't know much beyond that. You see it in ... Well, first-person essays always have a distinctive point of view. Every piece has a degree of point of view and voice in it. The question is, "Where does it come out most?" I think that's story by story, topic by topic.

Which one of your stories would you point to as having great point of view and voice?

November 2006 I did a profile of Barack Obama that was the first piece in the country that said he was going to run for president.

That's a pretty strong point of view.

Yeah. So I think that that's a piece that worked out in the argument in it.

So talk to me about that process.

That was a case where just reporting the hell out of something, talking to every single person involved in this incredibly nascent presidential ambition, led me to understand where things were going in a way that other people hadn't because they hadn't had the time to step back and look at this candidate's actions, this candidate's personal history, personal aspirations, personal ambitions, and what his advisers around him were saying to him.

So it was really doing all that research and then being able to do that analysis?

Yeah.

What was the feedback?

Well, I got the story right.

But you didn't know that for quite some time.

Well, I knew it in three months or so when he got into the race. I think that it was a piece that had a very distinct argument that proved true more quickly than I think most journalists get to see their work prove true. And so, it got very good response. And I

never heard from Obama that I got it particularly wrong, in his opinion. So that's not nothing.

When it comes to story selection and more large-scale decisions, how does point of view affect what you decide to run?

If you believe for instance that *Washingtonian's* goal is to understand the city better that is a very easy test for story selection. Does this article help me understand this city in some way better?

So it can really go back to the mission statement?

Yeah. And if there's not a direct link between point A and point B, no matter how great of a story it is, then it's probably not a story for us. I was saying to Jack earlier today that one of the things that I think is often overlooked is that the most important role of an editor is not what makes it into a magazine, but what he keeps out of the magazine. And that the things that don't match up to your standards, your view, your mission statement, you shouldn't put in because that muddies your mission, your point of view, your raison d'être for your readers.

Vanessa Grigoriadis, Contributing Editor for *New York Magazine*, *Rolling Stone* and *Vanity Fair*

January 29, 2009
2:30 p.m. at the *New York* magazine office
1 hour, 30 minutes

Can you tell me a bit about your background in journalism?

I was an editorial assistant here. I got the job pretty randomly through a friend. I worked here for about three or four years, doing junior editing, answering phones, stuff like that. I wrote a story called "Power Girls," which was about the publicity industry. It got a lot of attention, and basically, they were like "What do you want to do?" And I was like, "I just want to be a writer." So then I became a writer, a features writer, without really knowing how to write features. So it took me a few years to figure that out. I've worked at the Style section at the *Times*. I worked at the desk there. And I've worked as a contributor at *Rolling Stone* for about five years. And I just signed up to be with *Vanity Fair*. I do the standard mix of stories that you see in any of those magazines. Maybe not the music history in *Rolling Stone*. I don't write about politics very often. I do crime. I do profiles. I do a lot of profiles. I do social-trend stories. That's really what I would do all the time if I had my druthers. I really only do profiles because they're easy, they're fast, and you get paid the same amount. And they get published quickly. Someone has a movie coming out, we're going to do this story, it's going to happen versus oh, I think I'm going to write this thing about this thing that I noticed, and six months later, people are like what? That's what I really like doing. Like that Gawker story. I really like that. I'm very heavily influenced by Tom Wolfe and a lot of the early magazine writers who used that kind of social-trend writing. Basically the creation of story amongst a social group and kind of cast it with characters and made it like a little play with a lot of scenic elements. I

don't really set out to write in the first person very often. That's always the thing that I do when I have no other option. You know? But something like the Gawker story where I originally wrote an opening that had Julia Allison as the opening, and my editor was like this doesn't work. And I was like I don't know what to do, and then I was like this is so obvious, I'll just do this. But that wasn't at all what I was planning to do with the story. Now did I start out to write that story because they had made fun of my wedding, yeah that was a little bit of a last straw. You know what I mean? But we had been talking about doing it before. It was supposed to be a profile of Nick Denton, and he wouldn't agree. So then it became are we going to do it? Are we not going to do it? They made fun of my wedding, and then I just was like you know what fuck 'em, I'll just do it anyway. But doing it anyway means about 10 times more work. So you know, it's not something you always want to do. Everybody feels that way. I'm not the only one.

So you're a contributor for New York, Rolling Stone and Vanity Fair? What would your title be?

Contributing Editor.

Have you started writing for Vanity Fair?

Yeah, I wrote a piece. They haven't published it yet. They were supposed to publish it last month, but then they lost pages. So I'm still waiting for that to happen.

How would you describe point of view? How would you describe using tone and voice in your writing?

It's a hard question to answer because the answer is I just do it like I think it should be done. I write the way that I want to read something. I think that my voice is certainly flashy and sensationalist, and a lot of the time I go to the, I kind of put the foot all the way down on the gas. I like reading writing like that. But I also am a big fan of a guy named Erik Hedegaard. He's a writer at *Rolling Stone* who's a great writer. You pick up his stories. A, they don't sound like anybody else. They only sound like him. They are so finely crafted. They're deceptively easy looking to write. And they're so easy to read. They're like a tall, cold drink of water. You just drink it down, and it's over, and it's so awesome and so refreshing. I try to write like that. When I feel like I've done my job, it's when somebody has actually read to the end of an article and doesn't feel like it's drag, doesn't feel like it's a pain. Everybody has a house style. Obviously *The New Yorker* more than many other magazines. Here, we ... It's just basically trying to make a compound that's the right parts entertainment and the right parts information. You want to constantly be giving people a little bit of sugar with the medicine. That's my attitude towards it. If you mean point of view like how detached am I or how close do I get. Is that what that means? What does it mean?

It means taking it to a point where you feel as though you're an expert on a situation, where you're knowledgeable enough that you can insert your point of view.

That's interesting, that magazine people wouldn't use that because we just inherently, that's what we do. You get to a certain level of education on a thing, then you

throw in your point of view. Perhaps you're not even at all aware of what you're commenting on, and you still put in your point of view. Because yeah, definitely, we're certainly in a time where if *The New York Times* right now could take their writers and turn every one of them into Maureen Dowd or Frank Rich, they would have an amazing product. And we all know that. But that's just not how those people are educated, and that's not the product they're making. The issue, of course, is that we don't report quite as well as they do, so we can, bloggers don't report an eighth as well as we do. The more opinionated you're going to be, usually the further away from the actual information you are. So this is the big challenge of how to move forward. It's how to be both of those things at the same time. I'm lucky because I get to spend a lot of time on things. So I certainly try to know everything I need to know before I form an opinion. But you know, there's a lot of things that go into it. You've got a certain length. You're trying to make this thing fun to read. You're making serious claims about people's personalities that you're hoping are true. It's your hunch. You're going on your hunch a lot. Certainly in profiles where you're really not spending a lot of time with people. You're kind of looking at this person, and going OK, what do I think about the way this felt in this thing in just a couple of hours? Who do I know that's like them? It's like a fiction writing experience. OK, do I have a friend who kind of reminds me of this person? Can I think about what that friend is like and maybe this makes sense in this way?

I transcribe all my own tapes unless I really am too busy. I really think that has helped me a lot. It's like a meditative thing. There's a lot of pausing and different things you never would key into. It really helps you understand them emotionally in a way that you can't get on the first read, and you definitely won't get from a transcriber. I think that's great. But 90 percent of the people I know do not transcribe their own tapes, who are features writers, because it gets so dull. I would rather have myself transcribe the tapes, and then have them do the research. I'm really, really tired of the Google and Nexis research. It's become so awful because it's so fucking repetitive. You're digging and digging, and you just see the same things over and over. I find it really unpleasant. I don't really watch TV. I don't really read *Entertainment Weekly* or *GQ* or any magazine like that, so I don't really know what the fuck is going on with this person. I need to know. I have to have all the data. So how do you get all the data? So that's become a big thing for me. Either finding an assistant who can really get that stuff. I do have someone I work with now, who I pay, to really get me the right stuff. So I can quickly become totally informed on what I need to know about this person, true or not. But just like know it, and then fill in the dots from there.

What would you say are the advantages to taking a point of view in your writing?

First of all, there is point of view in everything. So pretending that there isn't. There's no objectivity. That being said, having worked at *The New York Times* and seeing the way that people take this so seriously, like just the facts and the objectivity of it, so seriously, it definitely saddens me to think that that craft is getting out of date because you really do have an enormous number of really smart people trying to be objective, and trying to be objective is all you can really do.

The advantages are entertainment based. It's easier to read something that's fun to read, and certainly having a very distinct point of view, tone and voice with it is going to

make it much easier to read. If you sat down to read some eight *New York Times* articles about Afghanistan that were say over 1,500 words, and then you sat down to read an essay on Afghanistan, a reported essay, I'm sure you would know a lot more, and you would have enjoyed it much more. Again, it's the thing with the perfect compound. How do you get people to take in this information and enjoy it at the same time? I think the issue is that as people get more and more out of step with both newspaper-style writing and kind of intellectual writing, it's harder and harder to get back on the horse. I think there are some writers at *The New Yorker*, where yes, if you read *The New Yorker* every single week, you would continue to feel comfortable with their style. Someone like Dana Goodyear, somebody who's practicing an old-school form. Like a Joseph Mitchell kind of form. That's a real difference, and I think that what you're seeing is that people are becoming more and more used to getting their news heavily weighted to a person's point of view online, and with these short blasts. They're too tired to sit there and read that whole thing. There's no question that there's an enormous shift going on in that way. And the challenge is just to keep people interested. Personally, I don't think there's anything I can do except to continue doing what I do. The work I do is extremely commercial. It's not like I'm writing about the sociology of whatever.

What are the disadvantages as well? What if you go too far?

That's the problem. There's a lot of just beating off about all this stuff that's going on that people are completely uninformed about. There is, for sure, a big swath of people who are successful in magazines who are like 50-year-old white guys who don't know at all what's going on amongst anybody except for their friends who all live on the Upper West Side who went to ivies and are cool people. They're definitely well read, and they're interesting people. And they have knowledge gained of like 30 years in journalism, but they're not reporting anymore. This issue of reporting versus being an essayist has become a bigger and bigger issue, as we see a lot of people are not doing reporting anymore. In terms of opinion columns or essays or stories that are written off of I talked to five friends basically.

Certainly there's never been a more exciting time to be a journalist. The world is in a lot of turmoil, and there's a lot going on. There's a lot of corruption, and there's a lot of things to be uncovered. And I think some of that is being done. As you get older and you don't have the same stamina, and you don't perhaps want to get on the plane quite as much and go knock on the doors of people who just shot their mother or do really unpleasant things. Plus just the rental car, the plane, the taxi, all this crap is just really hard on your body. I think that personally I still do it because I have to. But I'm a lot less, I'm still very aggressive. But I think when I was younger, I was more like, you have to let me into your house because if you don't let me into your house, I'm not going to be able to write my article because I need to be able to describe what your house looks like. And now my attitude is more like we can go to a coffee shop if that's where you're comfortable, and I'll ask you if I can go to your house, but If I can't go to your house, I can write my way out of it. People are inherently either reporters or essayists. The challenge of both of those sets is to do more of the other thing because that really balances your piece. I guess your question about the point of view, the issue is that a lot of people are making statements that they're not informed about making. It happens all

the time. I mean obviously. I don't really know much about a lot of different things. But I know when I've done a piece, I know what I'm talking about. And when I go look at the other articles that have been written, it's unbelievable how sloppy things are and how much is written on deadline and just parroting back what people have read. And particularly now with all of these blogs, it's just repurposed information. It's just regurgitated. Depending on how good you are, at *New York Magazine*, the bloggers are really good. They're really interesting to read. The point remains that there is a decreasing interest in reading things that do not have the point of view in it. I'm totally with you on that. That's for sure. And many people have said to me ... I don't write about myself that much. I'm known, OK. People in New York know who I am, right? But I'm not a known writer. I'm a magazine writer. I do some things sometimes that you would notice, oh who is this person? Other times you wouldn't. I'm a journeyman magazine writer basically. I want to write a book. I want to do all these things. I don't want to be another dipshit talking head on TV. I don't want to be this person who's just thought of as you do this, you talk about that. I think it's becoming much harder to exist and survive without doing that because the end point of that kind of point of view writing is oh, Maureen Dowd. Or I'm this. Or listen to me because I'm such and such. A personality, which is like, that's cool if you want to do that. But at the end of the day, that's just branding. I'm very curious about the world. I'm curious about things I don't know. I don't want to sit around all day talking about the things I do know. I want to write about the things I don't know about. But that's definitely an issue.

People are kind of always trying to push me to do more of that. Certainly, friends of mine who have written books, do now have blogs and try to stand for that thing and be more a person who is very in line with that thing in a way that I don't think they would have a few years ago. I think that's an issue. I put together a Web site last year just because I was so sick of people asking me for an article. Then I had to Xerox it and send it to them. I was like this is ridiculous. And *Rolling Stone's* archives are so terrible that you can't find anything on the site, so you have to at least provide if it if you want people to look at it. I don't know what to do from here. People are like why don't you just start a blog. I'm like I don't know. Someone said to me you have to have a Wikipedia page. I'm like OK, cool, maybe I'll have an assistant do that. Maybe I'll hire an assistant to write, maybe not a blog, but you know ... Somebody wrote this thing on Radar and was like when was the last time I published something? And I was like dude, I'm fucking publishing shit every month. What are you talking about? Just because it happens to not be getting picked up, and you're not seeing it, I'm publishing every month. Do I have to make a page that's like 2008, and then you'll see I did something? Things like that. I don't know. I definitely want to write a book, and I definitely want it to do really well. And I want people to read my writing. We're all in this for people to read our writing. But there's just so much ego that's coming into play now. It's just turning into TV or something. It's turning into this weird thing where everybody is self-promoting. Self-promotion is so weird. Journalists are not inherently self-promoters. We're listening to what people are saying. We're listening, so I don't get it. It's very odd. I definitely have not enjoyed all these people asking me who I am, and what I want to write about. I don't know. I just want to write about the next thing that I write about. I don't want to be constantly asked what I want to write about. You'll figure it out along the way. There's

definitely more pressure now to do that, and to be a little bit of a brand, and to be a little bit of a name. I'm lucky because I've always been a name because of that story I wrote. That's not to say that everybody I've worked with as a freelancer wants to use me again because they don't always want to. But they'd give me one story. So I've always had a leg up in that way. I have to believe that there is still a place for this kind of writing. I think there is.

This friend of mine was reading this John McPhee book. He built a canoe or something. I think it was John McPhee. He went and he hung out with this guy who was building a canoe. He then built the canoe. They got in this canoe, and they went on something. It was like a 15,000-word piece. Again, you should check this. I could be making this all up. So the story was something like this, and it was a book. And it was a 15,000-word article about this fucking canoe maker. So basically what his point was the possibility is that maybe if magazines change so much or die off or long-form journalism, 6,000-word stories are gone, which again, I don't really think they're going to, but you know what I mean. What might work for some people is basically taking these ideas and just making them slightly longer and making the writing a lot better and just doing them as entertaining books, which people might or might not read. But it's still getting published. But do something. There's more in the line of an experience.

What *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* do really well, which I don't do a ton of, but which they do really well, the writer goes on this journey. The writer moves to a pot farm and hangs out on the pot farm, working for two months, and then writes a whole story about that experience. I think that's inherently their point of view because they're going through it. And that's something that really works. People really want to live vicariously in that way, read about somebody else going through that. I think it's interesting because we assume that all points of view of people that we're reading in the magazines that we like are basically like us and making the same conclusions, which is not the case at all. But somehow you assume this person is kind of cool and whatever.

I wrote this story about Artie Lang. Yesterday I was doing this article, and it happened to be at Sirius. And they realized I was there. So I had to go and talk to these guys. And they were like this is a mean article. And I was kind of like I'm a dark person. I'm sorry you didn't realize that. You guys, first of all, which are totally offensive and misogynistic. You might be quote on quote nicer or something than I am or less judgmental and less analytical, but that doesn't mean you're nicer people. But I don't know why you assumed I was just going to be like you and see all the same things in this guy that you did. This is who I am, and this is what I think. This is my experience. I think it's funny that you do get like this sense that this magazine is this seamless product when really it's made up of so many people who have different thoughts. There are some Republicans in this office, not that many, but they exist. There are some people who are religious, probably not that many.

Now how has it differed at each magazine you've worked it in terms of what point of view you can take?

Let me just say one thing because this just occurred to me, and then I'll answer that. I wrote this freelance story recently, and it was about this woman who lives in Topanga, and she's a billionaire, and she's an environmental activist. But she has these

kind of ridiculous companies that are named Zen Bunny and all these funny, weird companies. When I read the article, I really liked her. She was really cool. She was really smart. I thought she was great. So I wrote this article about how great she was. And I turned it in, this was freelance, and I turned it into this editor. And the editor was basically like, "Oh, well we wanted more of a Vanessa take on it." And I was like well there is no Vanessa take. If I like the person, I'm not going to say I don't like the person. It's just whatever I think of the person. That's the take. So we had this kind of squabble over it. This was for *Plenty*, which was this magazine that just folded. It's an environmental magazine. And I was like I don't even understand why you guys would want to be so harsh on this woman when she is exactly like the kind of person that your readers are or the kind of person that your readers want to have invest in their companies. I was just like this is weird. I don't know what's going on. I definitely don't like that. I definitely think that I know that some of the things I wrote are harsh. I just happen to be pretty merciless and honest about what I think. I don't really like to hold my punches because I'm not trying to make friends. I definitely don't think I come at it always with a jaded attitude. My attitude is always open. Whatever I see is what I see probably more often than most people. But honestly, I really don't care about making friends. I think that colors a lot of people's work because I don't work on one beat. I've certainly screwed myself over with some publicists. There are many people I can't write about because their publicists don't like me. Sometimes justifiably and sometimes not. I don't need these people in the future. I don't have to sugar coat it because I'm not going to be your friend afterwards. We're not going to do favors for each other. I think that a lot of times why you don't get people's real point of view is because of that. It's like amazing how much people who are on beats have to cater to the people they're writing about. It's like almost a completely different job.

For *Rolling Stone* and *New York*, we can use profanity in *Rolling Stone* in a way that we can't here. But that actually matters because people do curse a lot. I think it's just a much more masculine publication. Maybe a little bit lower of a reading level. They really just want everything to be clear. They don't want to have any confusion in the mind of the reader. They want a couple points made. They want them really etched in, and then they want to get out of the piece. Here, we are much more likely to take creative steps that may or may not pay off. There are certainly pieces in this magazine and that I've written as well that are not finished, that are not perfect. They're just kind of thoughts written on deadline with as much information as we can get. It's really a weekly magazine. In a way for me writing for *New York Magazine* is much more intimate because I feel like I'm really talking to my peers whereas with *Rolling Stone,* I feel like I'm talking to a 20-year-old guy who I don't even know. I just try to make things kind of fun to read for them whereas here it's much more issues that I'm grappling with myself, or things I see around me, things my friends are talking about.

For some of the other places you've freelanced, Elle, Men's Journal, Nerve, how has it differed? Is it guided by the mission statement of the publication?

Yeah, I guess so. I don't know. That experience at *Plenty* was one of the few experiences like that that I've had. Actually I wrote this piece for *Elle* also about Seth Rogen, where they did the same thing to me. Where they were like, but they weren't

trying to say beat up on Seth Rogen, they were just like … It's the worst when you get a message from your editor, who's like, "We just want more of you in it." Why don't you say you just want it to be better? I understand what that means. We want you to make it better. It's not good enough. It's not as good as your other work that we read. For me, freelancing, the issue is basically that these people hound me to write things. Partially, it's nice they want to work with me. Partially, it's like somebody's bugging them to have them work with me. It's not that editor usually. It's a little like you want to work with me because I won this award. You want to write down that you have this person who won this award.

It's a pretty big award.

Yeah it's good. I'm into the award. I was fuckin' psyched. It was great. I mean again, it's an award for this fuckin' piece that took me two minutes. It boggles the mind. I put so much time into things that people have hardly read. And then you do something like that, and then suddenly you get this award. But anyway. I do not want to seem ungrateful. I appreciate every cent that's put in my pocket. I appreciate it. It's a great lifestyle. I'd be very sad if it disappeared. I only have one brain. I already work two jobs. Now I'm going to work a third. I really don't have time to do freelance work unless it's going to be very simple. I try to explain that. Look if it's easy, if it's simple, if it's interview this person, and then just tell us what you think, I'm good with that. But if it's something complicated, then don't call me. Call later. I love your magazine, but I just can't work with you right now. But people kind of don't take no for an answer. I just think that, what the hell were we talking about? Oh, the publications. That's the only thing I run into, people being like can you make it better? And I'm like OK, I'll try. I wrote this piece for *Men's Journal*. Unfortunately, Lance Armstrong was dishonest with me. So we got scooped from *Vanity Fair*, which was truly not really my fault. It was just something shitty that happened. I didn't get one edit on that piece. And that certainly as my writing is much cleaner in it's early stages. With smaller staffs and shit like that, I'm not seeing editing. I haven't seen a real edit in a long time. That's different for sure. I think part of it is that I understand what I'm doing. But it's always a pain in the ass when this person calls you, and you didn't really want to do this story, but you did it because you wanted the money, or because they seemed nice, or you liked the subject or whatever. You fly somewhere, you interview this person, you do the story, you think it's pretty good, you turn it in, and they send it back to you with like a thousand queries. And you're like what? And it's always, and people joke about this, it's always people at the least successful publication that send you the roughest edit. They're always the ones who don't say good job, who just act terribly to you. It's really weird. Like people say, at *The New Yorker* everyone's really nice. It's kind of a dog-eat-dog thing. The people who are at the lower rungs, they just don't care. They're just not nice to people. They just don't have that cultural civility in a way that a lot of other places to do. Those are the only things: Make it better, or somehow be meaner because I'm like this mean writer. Again, I have pieces that I've written that are very positive, and certainly I probably am more judgmental than most people, but if I do like the person, I don't attack them.

Some place like Radar, Maer's a really good friend of mine, and I worked with him here. They were doing a lot of very heavy duty editing because they really had a style. A real style. I think it would be interesting to talk to somebody from there.

What would you explain their style as?

I don't know. I guess it was snark. It's weird for me to think of that because Mear was at *New York Magazine* for a while, way before Gawker was around or any blogs were around. He was here in the mid '90s. What he was really interested in was basically taking the kinds of stories that *Vanity Fair* does but just doing them without cooperation, just marshaling all the negative information about the person and basically saying this is the other side of what these people don't want you to see. Mear is extremely invested in showing people the other side. Because he believes, which is true, that all this shit is way too controlled. We're not seeing the truth of these images. So he wants to show that. But he's a really rigorous reporter and a very rigorous editor and certainly crafting this thing with a serious house voice.

Is it a counterweight to these lame celebrity profiles that are on the cover of magazines? Yeah, it's a good counterweight. Sure. I think some of that is inherently also going to die. *Vanity Fair* will exist, and the beautiful cover stories and photography and all that glamour kind of stuff will exist. But I don't know if you're going to see celebrities on the cover of *Glamour* in 10 years in the same way.

How does point of view affect credibility?

I don't think it affects credibility. That's the thing. I think it depends what the outlet is. *The New Yorker* has point of view and a house style. Obviously people are using different formats. Although they use that profile format quite a bit, but there are people using different formats there. Look at *The Atlantic*. *The Atlantic* does a great job of saying here's a whole collection of people who are great writers and thinkers all with different points of view. You really feel like you're reading a bunch of people who are coming from different places. The standard of the writing is good, but it's not *The New Yorker*. But it's like here are a bunch of different things, and I think that's really cool. *New York Magazine* could definitely stand to do more of that.

Do you think New York and Rolling Stone are more uniform?

Yeah, I do. I think *The Atlantic*, of the magazines I read, is the least uniform. I don't really read the *New York Review of Books*. I think *Vanity Fair* has some pretty persuasive different kinds of people in there, different kinds of columns. *Vanity Fair* does a very good job with their mix. It's a great mix. I think they do the best job honestly with their mix. I really do. So how does it affect their credibility? I think it's just that people can't ...

Will people trust you more if you're saying what The New York Times should be saying but they can't, or does it hurt you?

I don't know. I don't know how sophisticated readers are. I wrote a story this year about the financial collapse. I met this guy who was working at a bank in subprime mortgages, and now he's working for the government. I didn't use his name, but I totally

made him exactly who he was. At one point he was getting really nervous, and he asked my editor if we could change his age or something like that. And he was like, "No, we're not changing any of the detail. Take it out, but don't change it." To me, that is a good piece because it totally explains who this guy is, and it's a good piece without his name. There are some other people who write here, who would not have written that piece, who do not agree with that style of writing, who think that if you can't get the guys name, you shouldn't be writing the article. I'm much more interested in the story then I am in somehow how true it's going to be or if it's going to get picked up and people are going to think it's important in the greater pantheon of the financial collapse or whatever other motivations people have for getting people's real names and shit like that. Do I think that every person who read that person thought that person really existed? No. I'm sure there are people who thought it was fake. And I think that's just the issue, infusing things with your point of view and infusing them with a lot of subjective kind of language and thinking, and I saw this, and I think that. It creates a feeling that you're not reading fact. That's the slippery slope. You want to think that this is real. This is not just me watching a couple of news programs in my bedroom and calling up a couple of people I know. I actually went and talked to these people, and you can trust me. You can't have your cake and eat it, too. You can't think that you can have all this fun writing this article and make it all about what you thought and you saw, and then think people are going to think that's a historical record of what happened. I don't think that's fair. I don't think I'm writing history. I'm just trying to entertain people and tell them, OK, here's this person, and you probably don't know who they are, but here's everything you need to know, and here's what I thought of them. Or here's something my friends are talking about, and it's really interesting because the world is changing in this way, and I think it's funny that we're a part of it in this way. But not like this is what happened in Pakistan today, and this is where the terrorists are.

Are there still objective points within your writing?

I certainly never put anything into any piece of writing that I don't think is true. I'm not in the business of trying to get sued. I'm definitely very meticulous about what I think is correct and what is not correct. And don't take the word for a gossip column, oh well the gossip column published it so that means it's right, which is also something you can do now that you couldn't do 10 years ago. You can get those things by lawyers now. I think the facts are basically objective, but nobody would deny that you're putting them in a certain order, and you're making a claim about them. You're not just listing them. It's all in the reading between the lines about those facts.

How do you think the point of view in New York differs from the online component?

I don't write for the Web site, so I don't really know. I do read them. I think they can say much more than we can, but they really don't care. They are in this position where they aren't even dealing with meeting the people. I meet the people, and then I feel like fucking horrible if I was going to like somehow attack this person with no cause. I would feel so bad. It's just like those scientific experiments: Will you shock the guy? From how far away will you shock the guy? Well these people aren't even meeting them, so obviously they're going to shock them because they don't care. And I'm willing to

shock them because I'm not going to see them again. But somebody who's on that beat is not going to shock them because they don't want to deal with it. So I think that's the continuum there. Definitely I think there's things they can say that we couldn't say. But generally, I'm pretty comfortable where I'm at in terms of what I'm able to say.

What do you try not to do with your point of view, tone and voice in your writing?

I try not to bore people. I try to make things pop a little bit. I try to make things be a story. I'm trying to get people to the end of the article. I try to give them fun things to read along the way because I think there are a lot of pieces. Personally, I get 200 words into about 80 percent of the things that I read, and I can't go on. So I think you're just trying to get the person who isn't ready to read a *New Yorker* piece, you try to get them to actually read this piece with you.

What do you look to for inspiration for point of view, voice and tone? Are there magazines that you read to be inspired?

Not really. I used to read a lot of Tom Wolfe. I certainly read a lot of Joan Didion as everybody has. I think Michael Wolf is great. I like a lot of the things that Christopher Hitchens has been doing recently. I think there are some people at Slate that are really good. I'm definitely interested in that whenever I'm looking for academic research kind of things. I always look at Slate and see what they're doing. I really like this guy Erik Hedegaard at Rolling Stone. I really like the way he writes. The guy who wrote the story in the *New Yorker* this summer. The one about the guy who posed as a kid.

If you had to pick a piece of writing that you've done that is a prime example of your point of view and voice, which one would it be?

This Paris Hilton story I wrote, which I'm totally proud of. I'm like the most proud of this article. That's pure; that's me. I got this girl to trust me in a very short period of time. She was Paris Hilton, but whatever. It's the only real article that's ever been written about Paris Hilton. I'm the only person who's ever spent any time with her to actually understand what her personality is really like. I got her to take me out at night with her. We had a really good time, and I felt like I really understood who she was. And then I just wrote it like a cinematic piece. It's like a documentary-style piece. These are all the different things she was saying. You learn through it that she's kind of like a pathological liar. You learn these little things about her. The issue is really, it's so dull, I cannot tell you how it feels to deal with this day after day, but like, day after day after day, I deal with people who want to give me an interview. They want to talk to me, but they don't want to show me anything. It's so lame. All day, all you do is ram up against this thing that you don't want. And sometimes they know that you don't want it, and they don't care because that's all they're going to give you. Other times, they don't understand, so it's like the process of trying to explain to them, I don't want to sit in a conference room. I want to go with you someplace else. Without freaking them out basically, you want to give them the opportunity to say no. You want them to say yes. It's just such a fucking pain in the ass. It was just a really great thing where it was like I was able to totally show who she was without having to be told anything. She can't tell you anything. To me, that's the closest.

Out of curiosity, did you get a lot of backlash or feedback from the Britney piece?

I got a lot of feedback. People really liked it, which I was pretty shocked about. I was kind of surprised. I didn't work on it that much. They wanted me to write it before she shaved her head. And I was like, I don't know. I don't want to do that. That sounds horrible as a write around. And then she shaved her head two days later. And I was like oh my God, I'm totally fucking off the hook. She shaved her head. She's going to go to rehab. It's over.

Justin Heckert, Contributing Writer for *ESPN The Magazine*

February 11, 2009
11 a.m. at REV Coffee in Atlanta, Georgia
1 hour and 30 minutes

Even when I was in journalism school, I thought that the best magazine writing had a point of view. I always thought if you spend enough time with someone and you immerse yourself with someone for a story... At *Atlanta Magazine*, that's what I was doing. You don't necessarily have to come to care about a person. You could literally hate them. But you kind of have to broadcast what your time was like with them in a way that really doesn't have anything to do with objectivity. You can't spend time with someone, and they're a dick, and then call somebody else and be like... You have to talk about how they were a dick when they were with you. You can call somebody else and say they probably aren't a dick all the time. But the truth is that they were a dick that day. And so my best example at *Atlanta Magazine* is a story I did about these two old men, who are each in their 80s, and they had always wanted to get married. It was a story about gay marriage and the gay marriage amendment that Atlanta had just again voted down. It's not necessarily outrage. But I was like, you know, I think it's kind of bullshit that half of marriages fail anyway. I took a stand on the issue obviously, and I wanted to find somebody to write about. So I knew I wanted to write about gay marriage. We were doing this love through the years issue. And I was like, let's just find some old people, and I'll write about a gay couple. So I met with a bunch of different gay and lesbian groups. I was going to do it on two people, and they were like you should do it on Bill and Doug. They're these two guys who lived outside of the city in this shaded neighborhood with all these oak trees and stuff like that. I went there, and they lived this harmonious life. They have their little organ in their house. They collected things like any couple would have. They had their art. And they knew each other better than anyone. They argued, they went to lunch and blah blah blah. It became apparent that like the hypocrisy and bullshit of the fact that they just couldn't sign a document was ridiculous. Their lives were amazing. First when they were together in the '50s they had to live in a lie. In the '60s, they decided to live together, but I wrote that they masked their affections by living platonically. Over the course of the years, people just began to assume, but they didn't come out to people until the late '80s or '90s or whatever. I mean they were 60. They had shared so many moments together. They went to New York City to the opera,

and they shared a coach car, and they secretly held hands and all this stuff. And I was like, you know, this really pisses me off. And so I wrote about it, and what I was telling John's class is that you can read my story and you can ... I didn't want to beat you over the head with my opinion. There's a difference between point of view and editorializing obviously. And so I wrote it in a very terse manner. I wish you could see it. It's February 2005. It's about 2,500 words. Each section is about this long of a paragraph. And each section is a fact, and it's a tersely written fact that's like love is blah blah blah, and they did this and they did this. The whole thing is meant to be, "Listen reader, doesn't this not really make sense?" And then one of the paragraphs is just a bland, "The amendment failed by this much." They'll probably never be able to get married. I did it in a way that expressed a point of view, but it was a magaziney type of thing. There was a style to it, and the style had a point of view. It was just terse, stark. This is my opinion, but this is fact. Like can you believe this? Look at these facts. They did this. They did this. They did this. They love each other. Are they really any different? I never really asked that. If you could read it, you'd see what I mean. But my point of view was that it was bullshit.

I guess everything that I've done probably has some. I never did journalism until I was in the journalism school. I started out taking all the newspaper classes, and I had newspaper internships, and I just knew it wasn't what I wanted to do. But I did get a ground, I have a base in learning how to report on deadline. That really helped my reporting out a lot. When I was at the *LA Times*, it was really grueling. And I knew I didn't want to be in that atmosphere, but it was kind of cool also. You had to call everybody. And it was all about objectivity. I wrote a lot of news stories. It's almost so different as to be a different profession. Anyway. I think it has to do with taking risks and trying to have a voice. The first story I did at *Atlanta Magazine* was about the spelling bee. We had to decide if I was going to be part of the story, and I was part of the story. The point of view was like I'm rooting for this person. There's no well, such and such says she's a good speller, and this person says she spells the best. She's a really good fucking speller, and I like her. Part of the story was about rooting for her. How much better was it because of those emotions than it would have been? I don't want to say I hate objectivity, but I don't ever think about it. And I don't think about it in newspaper, collegiate, Poynter Institute terms. I think that you have to represent either side of something. And I believe in it. And I believe in the principles of journalism. I just sometimes think that you can be creative, and that word (objectivity) is as vague as any other word. And I haven't been doing this a very long time.

What is your background? When did you graduate?

I graduated in '02. I just wanted to be a writer. I wanted to be a writer, and I wanted to be a cartoonist. And then I went to Mizzou for art. In my very first semester, when I was at the Arts and Sciences building, and I was in the program, my teacher was crazy, and she was like, "You know, my advice is don't do it. We don't have the backing. We don't have the facilities. Look at this." I mean it was a shitty building. I don't know if you've ever been in Arts and Sciences. It's terrible. Everybody has a class in Arts and Sciences, and it's like the oldest, most decrepit. It did suck. And I was like yeah, you're probably right. So then I was going to do creative writing. I took all the creative writing classes. I got a minor in English, but I was like what can I do when I graduate? I don't

want to teach really. So I was like oh, well, I probably need to pick a major. So I just did journalism to see what it would be like, having never done it before. The first year it sucked because like J200 and J105, and I had a bitter J105 teacher who worked at the *Tribune*. We had to go out and do stories that never got published. So I went to like Schnucks and tried to find ... it just blew really. I was like, is this what I want to do? But when I got o the *Missourian,* it really changed my life. I picked sports because I was like, well, I'll go cover some games and write some stories. Maybe I'll decide I don't like it. But when I saw my byline, it was like seeing something published. It really got me interested. Immediately, I began just trying to be weird and experiment. Over the course of those couple years, I started to read magazine writing and nonfiction. I never really did. My mom was an English teacher. I had read every book that she ever taught. I've read everything but not really a lot of nonfiction. I began to see. I was like, holy crap, this really interests me. I started reading everything. Teachers had magazines there, and reading them, that became my goal, to do that. And having said that, I did a lot of news. My first internship was a nonpaying internship at the *Southeast Missourian*. I'd work that in the mornings and did little stories. And then at night, I'd go do another job that paid. And then my second internship was at the *LA Times*. The atmosphere was really, really tough. I remember sitting there. The whole process was... There was the first day when all the interns went to the newsroom. You were like here's what you've got to do. And it's like a ruler slapping you on the wrist. I was like, this whole process, let me go out and try to do stories. I don't need to be in competition. And some of the people there were huge journalistic posers. Like "God, I'm the fucking king. Look at me." I was just there and excited and not knowing what was going to happen. I've run into so many people in journalism like that. Anyway. Near the end of my internship, I got to do some features and some human-interest pieces. Bill Dwyre was the editor of the sports section, and when I left, they wanted me to go do a story instead of go back to school. I was like, I want to go back to school, and I want to be a magazine writer. And they were like, well, it's a very lonely profession, I hope you know that.

And at this point you're a junior? A senior?

I was going back to be a senior. So I went back. Here's what happened. So I went back for my senior year, and I was like I'm going to focus on my English classes, I'm going to take nonfiction in the English department, which is a totally different bird than being in the journalism school. And I'm going to read, and I'm not going to write for the *Missourian* every day. My senior year, I was on staff at *Vox*. I was an editor. I edited the essay. *Vox* has changed completely since I was there. The back page was called The Last Word. It was a 1,500-word essay on two pages. I edited that with somebody else. It was really fun. It was really gratifying. I really loved the editor there when I was there. Everybody was cool. I made a lot of relationships there. I helped people get published in *Vox*, and it was working with them on stories. And it was hard to distance myself. The next semester I was a staff writer, and I wasn't on staff at all. I did an independent study with Jen Moeller, and I just wrote stories for *Vox*. I lived at *Vox* because I loved it. I was like, this is fun. I remember we got in trouble because I was going to publish a story one of my friends wrote about how one night he took this drug called foxy. He was like extremely messed up. People had to carry him through bars. It was about taking the drug

foxy. And Tom Warhover was like there's no way in hell we're going to run this. And I was like that's such bullshit. So we got in a battle over it. We had a big meeting with Tom Warhover and the people, and I was like I stand by the story. It was fun. I thought it was bullshit that they wouldn't run it. He had written this 4,000-word opus. And I was like to run it we're going to have to get it down. But it was two pages. So what I did was, it didn't run because it's the journalism school, but I copied it for him and printed it out as though it were a clip. So he got to keep it. It's stuff like that. We worked really hard. That was when September 11th happened. We did that black 9/11 issue. It was really just a kick-ass semester. So what happened was the people over at the *Missourian* got pissed that I had come back to school and wasn't going to write for them. I was like no; I'm just going to do *Vox*. I'm not going to do sports anymore. So I wrote one sports story. I told them I'd do it. I reported it for three months, and I wrote it. And they ran it as a double truck in the newspaper. It was like 5,000 words. And that was the only story I really wrote for the *Missourian* that last year. And then I did English. I had a shit load of books to read. I still hung out at *Vox*. I was a staff writer, but I only wrote for *Vox*. And then it ended, and I was like I don't know what I'm going to do. So I went to New York on spring break right before school ended. I went to all the magazines I wanted to write for, got to meet a ton of people. Went to Conde Nast, Hearst, *Harpers*. Basically, the day I went into *ESPN Magazine*, I talked to their managing editor and said basically this is what I want to do. She offered me an internship on the spot. I said OK. I went back to school for a couple months. School ended. I went to a buddy's wedding. Flew up to New York City. Did the internship. My internship ended. This doesn't have anything to do with point of view.

That's OK. It's your background.

They said we want you to write a feature. Find a story when your internship ends. So I did, my internship ended. I went for a couple months, reported a story. Came back. It got published. I lived on that money for a few months. So I lived in New York off the money I made on that story for a few months. I had a friend who was an editor at *GQ*. So I would go over there, and he would buy me lunch, and I would pitch him stories. Nothing would ever work out, and eventually he left. But he would go and take me into their archive room, and I would sit there and look back through their archives and read National Magazine Award winning stories. I just couldn't get enough reading. When I went to *Atlanta Magazine*, I went through all the back issues. I'm fascinated by the history. Anyway. There came a point to when I ran out of money in New York. Having known several of the people who graduated with me and went up there to try to be editorial assistants and stuff. Hearing from them what it was like or the fact that they couldn't get a job, I knew that's not what I wanted to do. I didn't want to not write and get somebody coffee and donuts. I didn't want to be somebody's whipping boy. So I was like you know there's a ton of city and regional magazines who run really long stories. And so I sent out a letter to four or five of them that I thought looked good, that I thought looked like national magazines, that were designed really well. I read the editor's letter. So Rebecca (Burns) called me after I sent my clips and said we might have a job opening. Would you like to come down here? So I did. They offered me a job. And then I just

moved. I had never known anybody in Atlanta before, and I just moved. That first year I wrote four stories, and then I won writer of the year at CRMA. And then I got a story in *Esquire*. *ESPN* hired me back after my second year. I wrote about nine features for *Atlanta Magazine*. After that second year, *ESPN* was like we want you to do what you're doing at *Atlanta Magazine* for us. So I left and signed a contract. And they were like you can do whatever else you want that's not sports. It's been three years now. The first year I only did one story, and I spent seven months on it. My contract was like you have to write five stories. I turned it in and it ran and everything. They were like we're going to renew your contract, but you have to write more than one story. The second year I wrote a lot more than one story. I have one person there that I work with who used to be the only person there that I work with. Now he's kind of branched me out a little bit to work with a couple different people. He's really awesome. His name is Chris Berend. He could probably help you a lot, too. He was an editor at *Esquire* and came over to *ESPN*. I was the first guy who he took under his wing a little bit. And we've done a lot of good stories there. We've done some of the best stories they've run. This leads me to what I actually had planned to talk to you about, which is the latest story I wrote for him, which is like this unbelievable struggle for me, and it's all about point of view. So that's basically my background. Now let's talk about point of view again.

So what's the story?

I went to Oxford to write a story about this guy for the fan issue of *ESPN The Magazine*. Oxford, Mississippi. He's this guy who has a song written about him. You can get it on iTunes. It's called "Letter to Chico." His name is Chico Harris. All that was explained to me when they came to me was that he's just this crazy fan who everybody knows in Oxford and who's really weird. And he snuck into all these sporting events. He gets tickets for free. He climbs the fence and sneaks in. We want you to go do a story about he's a frugal fan. We want his tips on being a frugal fan. So I was like oh, that will be fun. I love Oxford. I have friends there. So I went there for a week, and this is the nature of magazines, the story just completely was different from what they said. What they said was that everybody knew him. He was around. He was a fixture of Oxford. But he was basically a homeless guy. And when I went there, he was constantly crying. All he had was his dog. He rented this office right on the square. When I talk about office, I mean this little bitty ... It was almost like the size of a closet. And he had a dirty mattress on the floor. He found this computer in the trash. And he wore the same clothes. And nobody knew he was living like that. He had a lot of friends, but the thing is like everywhere he went, people loved him being there and it was kind of like it was fun to have him around, but he was easy to forget about when he left. And he got everything for free. We would go somewhere, and they would give him a free coffee. He literally had no money, no money whatsoever. Completely broke. And people paid for his rent. And his truck broke down, so he needed rides. And I gave him a ride everywhere. He was hitchhiking. He got hit by a car in 1997, and the car nearly crippled him. So he couldn't afford a doctor. The town hosted a celebration for him to get money. He used the money to pay for rent and all this stuff. He needs surgery, and he still has all this pain. I just went down there and founds this really depressed ... I had a fun time because we went out to all these parties. I got to see him around other people. People were like, "Man, you know,

Chico, he's a mindset, he's a troubadour, and everybody loves him." I was like whoa, this is crazy. He smoked weed a lot for pain, and that was really interesting like everywhere we went. People really did love him. We were tailgating for the game and people were like "Oh man, Chico is a big party. Chico." My point of view is that they really don't understand his whole situation. I spent Thanksgiving with Chico, which was crazy. We went to his parents' house in Tupelo. He felt very awkward around them. And it was awkward for me because here I was with all these strange people on Thanksgiving, and they're giving me food and stuff. He feels like he's the black sheep of the family. He doesn't have a job, and he's homeless. There was that. And then we drove back to Oxford and that night went to a private Thanksgiving dinner party on the square at a restaurant that his friends own. And he was the king of the party. It was so weird to see him like that. So I spent all this time with him, and he was constantly in pain, taking illegal prescription medications somebody would give him.

So I went back home and I wrote Berend, who's my editor on this, everyday. I went back home and was like well, I'll just write about how crazy of a fan he is. So I wrote about how crazy of a fan he was. And Berend was like this is good, but we're not going to run it because this isn't about anything you talked about. This is an instance where what you've told me was more interesting than what you were assigned to go do. So you know, go over Christmas break, this was right before Christmas break. I was just like I need to get Chico out of my mind. It was really hard to write it. I couldn't figure out what to write about. It's a sports magazine. So I went on Christmas break, came back and rewrote it again. He was like no, we have to figure out a way to do it. Mentally exhausted, I was like you know what, screw this. I'm just going to write about how he made me feel. The story I just turned in a couple weeks ago, I wrote it completely from my point of view except it wasn't in first person. The first sentence was, "It was easy to like him, and it was even easier to feel as though he'd always been a friend." That's how he made me and everyone feel. And that's just the truth. It's my point of view. It's the truth. Everybody felt like, "Oh, Chico..." When I came there, everywhere we went people treated me like I was with him. People loved him and all this stuff. And then the second section is like, "It wasn't easy to tell him the truth." When I was down there I was like dude, look at you. Do people tell you? And he was like, "Oh..." The whole story was from my point of view about the things I experienced with him, the awkward situations we were in. How I felt, again not first person, which really wasn't hard to do. I was like I wonder if that'll be hard or not. It's straight third-person imperative. But it's all about how I felt. It's the truth of what happened. The objectivity in this case is if you talk to somebody else, they're kind of blind to what's really going on. The truth is what I saw. And I saw this sad, homeless person who goes to the Chevron station and gets free corn dogs and free beer. And he loves to party, and he likes the fact that everybody knows his name. But I just tried to write about what I saw. So everything is, "It was blah blah blah to do this, and this happened." It was all backed up by what other people were saying and by his quotes. I just thought it kind of applied to this in that I tried so much, and what I avoided doing was just kind of writing about the truth, which was from my point of view. I don't see how you spend a week with somebody every morning and night, and it's just a lie. That's just who he was.

So now what was the response from your editor?

He really liked the third version. And he said, "I'm passing it around," which in magazine speak is he showed it to the top people there, and I haven't heard back from him. I just hope it works. It's just been a struggle. I've probably written 10,000 words about Chico. This last draft was 4,000. It's not judging or editorializing. It's just this is how he made me feel. And that's one thing I think magazine journalism allows you to do this, and it's better. There's that time when you do get to spend ... It obviously requires you spending a lot of time with someone. You kind of get to know them a little bit. You can kind of write about them with a sense of who they are. It's like you know there are stories about sense of place, and there are profiles about the sense of who the person is. I'm pretty certain that who I saw ... I mean I just wrote about what I saw. To try and make things lighter than they were by talking to somebody else and being like "How fun is he?" I think it would have been a disservice to the actual truth.

In your own words, how would you describe this concept of point of view? You've talked about it a lot, but if you had to slap a definition on it, what would you say?

I think it's ... It isn't like a friend writing about somebody they really know because obviously in every story you don't become friends with the person, you don't know them as well as a friend does. It's that unique experience that allows you to see oftentimes who a person really is. And I think you owe it to the reader to present exactly how you see them. And maybe they were having a bad day or maybe they weren't, but you know this is who they were. I think point of view is like ... it's not really unique ... it just so happens that the writer is there experiencing it. Point of view is about voice, and it is about the writer obviously, but I think point of view is also just not being afraid to write about what you really saw and present a person or a situation. This obviously just doesn't have to do with people you're profiling. It's sights and smells and how something felt. It's style and voice. It's hard to explain unless you're sitting there feeling it and writing it. It changes from story to story.

Well it sounds like you're saying that it speaks to a truth about a person, place, thing or idea.

Yes. I think you can do it in newspapers. I do. I guess it's just the old inverted pyramid and some of the stodgier things about journalism really don't talk about it. But I think it's a big part of journalism. When I read a story by somebody else, I want to read their voice. It's not necessarily coming out and saying something sucks or is good or is evil. It's really just presenting it in a way where you learn something and can make up your own mind about it. As a writer, there are instances where you can come out and just say it, but oftentimes, it's presenting something in a certain way to a reader, and they'll be able to be like oh yeah, I didn't know that. I don't think about it when I go do a story. I just particularly thought about it this time because it turned out to literally be my point of view.

ESPN touts itself as having this voice. It's like this unique, fresher voice than say *Sports Illustrated* has. But I think in all this hipness, they really do want people to have a point of view. Their editor likes to say that he wants people to have a take on something. And I just think that means, it's like having a thesis about something. I think John Smoltz

blah bah blah. It's not editorializing. It's almost essayish in a way. I wrote a story for *ESPN* about a guy who imitated a bunch of Steelers players and got arrested twice because of it. I did have a point of view. It wasn't strong, but it was kind of like this guy is .... the women aren't angels. It wasn't a news story obviously. There's a point in the story where I was like you can kind of imagine maybe you would have a laugh at them. It is funny in a stupid way. The beginning is about how you can look at the picture and be like what is she thinking? She's kind of stupid. And it's the truth. And the story is like you know, they're probably not gold-digging whores, but they're also not angels either. Obviously they wanted to date Steelers players. And this guy is kind of a prick, and he's an idiot, and he also maybe unbalanced mentally. And they loved that I had a take about it. It made it a magazine story.

How has point of view differed at all the different publications you've worked at?

Say I was writing a story at the *LA Times*, it was strictly about the things I observed. It wasn't about a point of view. It was about detail. It was about, "Oh he walks through the dugout." I did a story about one of the coaches for the Dodgers dad had Alzheimer's, and it was about how he kind of nursed him until the end. And it's kind of like a gag me, but it was literally write 2,000 words about it, and I was like OK, yes I will. I tried to write it in a very non-sappy way. There wasn't really a point of view. It was more of a kind of a straighter news feature. Getting across some of the things about how this guy was really sad about it. It was much different. There really wasn't a style to it. In that sense, I really felt caged by all that stuff. I just feel like I have a lot of things to say, but not in an editorial. I don't have an opinion. I don't have all these opinions that I want to get in print. I feel like when I do something, I'll eventually have something to say about it. I think in every story since I've been at *Atlanta* and probably *ESPN*, I've had a definite point of view in my stories. I would hope that you come away with a sense of how I felt and experienced things in the pieces. I guess that's mainly what it is. It's like I wrote about Skip Caray for *Atlanta Magazine*, and he was this ... every other word was the "f" word. He was angry, which was the truth, but it was also like ... he's also kind of light-hearted. You know his wife came in. I presented things as they happened in the story. The point of view wasn't like ... he kind of came across as an asshole, but I really knew that he wasn't. It's hard to talk about.

Does voice have to change from say Atlanta Magazine to ESPN? Is there a different target? Is there a different goal?

I think the voice has been different only in that I'm not writing 8,000 words for ESPN. In a way yes and no. There have been some stories where I haven't had that room to play around. But in some I have, and I would say that the voice is the same. So they want me to be that person. And my voice changed every story at *Atlanta Magazine*. It changes every story. It just depends on what you're writing about. You can't be lighthearted if you're writing about something dark. You can't be fun if you're writing about this issue that you're kind of pissed off about like the gay marriage amendment thing. And that wasn't a fun story by any means. And the voice was a lot different. It wasn't bouncy like the spelling bee story or long sentences. I mean everything was very terse and to the point. I'm still learning every time I do something. Like the story that I'm

going to go do, the point of view I haven't done any reporting on it. I'm going down there on Friday. The point of view is from the dad's point of view. I think it might be different in the fact that I wasn't there to observe anything. It's a complete retelling of what happened, so it's going to be through his ... And that's different, too, when you're writing about something that's happened that you didn't observe. It's generally from that person's point of view. It changes the whole thing. It's retelling something. It's hard to put your own ... You can do it in your voice, and you can make it want you want it to be, but it's impossible since you weren't there to see it. You have to rely on that person to render it for you. This will be different from the Chico story. The only thing I'll experience is just hanging out with this guy and his son. But that story was about what happened to us. This story is about what happened to this guy in the past.

When in the process do you get comfortable enough where you can say this is what it is and put out your point of view?

There's not a point in time when I'm writing something where it's like now I have to insert my point of view. It's almost a natural thing. It just occurs when you're writing. That's why it's hard to explain. I never stop and say OK, here's where I'm going to have to insert a point of view or something like that. It's just completely natural, and it's often that I never think about it. When I was writing that gay marriage story, I honestly never stepped back and said OK, I need to have a point of view. I just wrote it in a way that was slightly outraged. It ended up fitting in that point of view. To me, point of view, it's not that it doesn't mean anything to me because it obviously does. It's also like this story needs to have a narrative arc. It's like OK, I kind of know that, but I don't really know exactly what that means. It's like every single person mentions that a lot. I mean other writers at *ESPN* are like, "I need to have a narrative arc." I'm just like what are you talking about? I don't even know what that means. I know kind of, or I wouldn't be able to do it. But it's hard to talk about because I honestly don't know exactly. I don't sit there and think about it when I'm writing at all.

So it's more unconscious?

It is. I think that's a good point. It's always unconscious. And it's not that I don't want to have an opinion on something, but my experience feels the writing, and If I'm outraged or happy or whatever, that will come across.

Have you always been comfortable having a voice or is that something that's developed over time?

Well, it's certainly developed because I'm better now than I was in college, and hopefully in the future, I'll be better. I've learned so much along the way. I don't know if I'd necessarily be able to do that or contemplate that a few years ago. Just writing and getting that experience makes you, I don't know. I don't know how to answer that really. I don't necessarily feel comfortable writing any time I do it. Writing is a struggle. Sometimes I feel comfortable knowing that I can probably do it. It's uncomfortable staying up all night trying to write. To me, it's a really hard process, and I often struggle with it. I remember when I was at *Atlanta Magazine*, Lee, when he was editing me, I

would go to this place up in his little cabin, and we would talk for hours about a story. I would tell him this is really a big struggle for me to write this.

And what would he tell you?

He was just wonderful. He would be like well, sometimes you need to take a break from it. Don't let it own you. Fight with it. At some points literally during the point I was writing at *Atlanta Magazine*, mostly when I was starting out because I was writing these longer stories, I knew the deadline was approaching, and I was struggling with it, and I'd have nightmares. And I'd talk to him about them, and he'd be like well it sounds like the nightmares are brought on by the fact that you're struggling or nervous about the deadline. He was Tom's editor as well, and he talked to me a lot about voice and a lot about voice changing from story to story. I never talked to him explicitly about point of view, but I'm sure he'd have something really eloquent to say about it. His experiences, he worked at a newspaper, he did the Sunday magazine at the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, and he edited *Atlanta Magazine*. I've read a lot of those old stories that he did in the '80s, and they all have point of view in them. He's like a magazine savant almost. I just sit there, and I can't believe I'm getting to work with this guy. I didn't work with him all the time at *Atlanta Magazine*, just for two stories. Rebecca, who's the editor-in-chief of *Atlanta Magazine*, I'm sure would have a lot to say about it. She's the person who hired me, and she's like completely aware of writer's voice. I've never talked to any of these people about point of view ever. It's almost like this unspoken thing. It's like talking to someone about style. It's just a part of what magazine is to me.

Even though *The New Yorker's* writing is drier, they still have point of view in their stories.

Do you think with these magazines, that the point of view and voice is more individualized or more uniform?

I've never worked at a place where it's completely uniform. But I'd say that magazine, where David works (*Esquire*), let their writers sound different. There's not a whole voice. Although I will say that they like the magazine to be uber masculine. It is a magazine for men. Sometimes I was like you don't have to beat me over the head with fuck and cunt. Like *ESPN*, they do the same thing. They used to be really bad about it before I worked there with younger, hipper, slang type stuff. They've moved away from it now. They're actually redesigning the magazine.

Is it going to go smaller one of these days?

I don't think so. It might. I really don't know what they're going to do. When it started it was about the design. I know that they do want to run longer stories, and they told me that. My future there is within doing the bonus pieces and things like that.

Another big thing that people have talked about is this notion of being an expert on something. Once you're an "expert," you can start writing. Is that something you think about?

I don't think I've ever felt like an expert on anything. I don't think you could ever be an expert on someone. I don't buy that. You could spend three months with them and

still not really be an expert on their life. Because I think they might act a little differently around you. Another mission is to get them completely comfortable with you, and then they might not. That's like writing a perfect story. You can't be an expert on anything. You can learn something, but I'll never be an expert on this guy or his son or water. I have to be an expert on water-survival tips before I write this. I don't even know what that means.

Now with objectivity, you've said that in some ways it' s a myth.

I still feel like the word does mean something. I mean I remember at the university, I don't know what you took, but I remember having a lot of bullshit classes there. Like how to do a resume. But I do think, when I think of objectivity, I also think of on the one hand, you must see the other side, and on the other it's like trying to talk to enough people to paint a full picture of somebody. But in the strict sense, I think the word itself is ... I really don't want to come across as a moron, so I'm really thinking about this. I think about it in a way, but in another way I don't really think about it because in a magazine story, they want me to have a voice on something. They're relying on me, and I feel like I should talk to enough people to get a sense of something and not just interview the person and write a story about them. You know? In another way, I don't want objectivity to stand in the way of presenting something like it is. I use an example as my time with Chico. Was it an objective experience? I talked to his parents and his friends, but from what I saw hanging out with him, what they said wouldn't have mattered at all over my experience of what happened to us. Because this is what happened. This is the truth of what happened. It doesn't have anything to do with being objective. It's just my experiences with him in this crazy week. And it was the truth. I think it's pretty accurate. It's almost impossible to apply because I don't know what steps to take to make a piece objective.

But it sounds like you take a lot of care in your sourcing, talking to enough people to get to that truth, talking to Chico's parents and friends.

But see the thing is they don't say, they're like, "Oh you know, he's such a sweetheart." And he is a very caring, goodhearted person, and I try to make that come across. But they hardly had anything to say because none of them really knew the extent of his poverty.

What about his family?

Sort of. Tupelo's like an hour away, and they don't go visit him in his little office. I don't think they know how bad it is. I think they separate themselves from having to think about it. It's like you go out and you party with someone, and they're like, "Oh, come here and get free beer Chico. And let's smoke up, and let's do all this stuff." And they don't ever have to think about what he has to go home to. And that's what I wrote about. I actually took the stance in the story that he needs some help. That's just the way it is. That's point of view. But it doesn't have anything to do with calling his dad and asking him what's another side of Chico. It doesn't have anything to do with being objective.

What do you try not to do with your point of view?

Not to write a column. I've never come out and said an opinion really. I've always tried to let a reader come away with an opinion. They're smart enough.

So you can guide them there?

To present things as they happen, experience wise and the truth of what happened to us and what other people are saying, the color and the sound and the smells. Everything that's narrative and the detail. They can make up their own mind. I don't think I've ever been the extreme of like such and such is this. That's why I'm interested to hear what Tom says because he has done that. And I think he would probably even go further and say that objectivity is a real myth, which it is. I just don't have the experience that he has in writing about celebrities. I'm really interested to hear what he says. He's written that he would go kick somebody's ass. I've never done anything like that. He has a voice, and he's ambitious. But see they've done some of the most important journalism of our time. It's laughable to really have what I have to say about it.

How do you think all of this affects credibility with your readers?

It just depends on what they want to read. It just depends. I don't know who reads *ESPN*. I never write for the audience. At *Atlanta Magazine*, the subscription is like 58-year-old rich, white women. I just think about what I want to read and write for my peers and stuff and my editors. I just write to make myself happy. That's one of the reasons I like writing, to try to one-up myself and get other people who like to read writing to like it. I'm sure it's like short story writers. They don't write for a particular, they just try to sell their story to whatever publication they can. They're just writing to make themselves happy, and to get it out there and produce and to be happy with their art. At *ESPN*, I don't even know if I want to know the demographic. I just write for myself. I just write to make my editor happy. And they want good stories.

Do you pay attention to the mission statement of the publication?

I knew the mission statement at *Atlanta Magazine*. I just did. It was actually kind of like enlighten and entertain.

Tom Junod, Writer-at-Large for *Esquire*

February 11, 2009
1 p.m. at Starbucks Coffee in Atlanta, Georgia
1 hour

What is your background in journalism?

My background is that I didn't go to J School. I was an English major at the state university of New York at Albany. I was an English major and took one journalism course that I had a really good time with. But at the time, I was so not thinking of doing journalism. As it turned out, William Kennedy was the journalism honcho there. This is pre-*Ironweed* and pre the books that made his name. He was just sort of considered a

failed novelist who taught journalism and stuff. And I never even took one of his classes. It turned out that he was sort of this legendary journalism guy who worked for the *Albany Times Union* for many years as he was writing his novels. So I never even saw myself in journalism. I never saw that as a possibility. When I got out of school, I went and was a salesman. I sold ladies handbags in this massive, massive territory. Not that I wanted to sell handbags. I didn't want to, but I did that job. And it was a huge job. I was on the road for six days out of the week. It was brutal. I wrote on the road. I always wanted to write and I was reading. I'd sit in the Holiday Inn at night and read. And then I lost that job, which was inevitable.

I guess the first nonfiction thing I ever wrote, I got held up at gunpoint in a hotel in Los Angeles, and it was not a pleasant experience to say the least, and I wrote about it afterward. It was the first nonfiction piece I ever wrote. Before that I had never conceived of writing nonfiction. I didn't know what writing nonfiction was. I didn't publish it anywhere, but after that I did realize that you didn't have to make it up. You could write about experience without having to make it up. And then I started kicking around. I came to Atlanta because my brother lived here, and I started kicking around at various jobs. I worked as a waiter. My first paying gig as a journalist was temping. There was an insurance company... What was the name of it? It was like the Amway of insurance. Their symbol was a pyramid, which tells you... They were very upfront about what they did. It was a pyramid scheme, so they were very upfront about what they actually sort of did. Anyway. They had a little employee's newsletter where they'd profile all their winners. I had a job loading that off the printing press. I looked at it and I said, I can do this. I can write these things. I asked where the editor was, and I walked over there and said I can do these things. She had me do like 50 of those little profiles over the weekend for I don't know, like $5 or something like that. And that was my first paying gig. So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I just came out of nowhere. I have no sort of schooling or education with that. I worked at a trade magazine for a while, worked in PR for a while.

My first thing where I actually wrote sort of, wrote in any sort of journalistic style that is recognizably mine is a freelance piece that I did for *Atlanta Magazine* back in 1984. And then in 1987, Lee Walburn, who's a really good guy and sort of a mentor to both Justin and I, he got the job as editor of *Atlanta Magazine*, and I did a piece for him right after he got the job. I delivered it to him, and before he even read it, he sat me down and said, "Don't you think it's about time that you took a staff job at a magazine someplace?" And I said, "Sure." And he said, "How about taking one here?" And so he offered me the job. I was so out of the loop. I was so disbelieving that when I got home, I called him. I said, "Were you just kidding around, or did you just offer me a job?" So then I started writing for *Atlanta Magazine* and then began to write magazine pieces, learned how to do that, and to write a lot of them. Lee expected us to write a lot. He expected us to write a major feature every month, which we did. It's a lot. And those features were not short. They were 5,000- to 10,000-word range, and we were doing one every month. But it was around that time that I had actually started to read journalism. I had not read anything at that time. And the first guy that I stumbled on, I read Gary Smith in *Sports Illustrated*. I stumbled on his piece on Muhammad Ali, but he did it through the voices of the people in his entourage and stuff. So it was Ali as reflected through these

sort of hangers on. It just blew me away. Gary was just doing stuff that I just couldn't imagine that you could ever be allowed to do. So I started trying to press it a little bit more, and I've been sort of trying to press it ever since. And of course a lot of that pressing, point of view is at the heart of it.

So how did Atlanta Magazine take you to Esquire?

Well, I worked for two or two and a half years at *Atlanta Magazine*, and I got a National Magazine Award nomination there, which I guess was pretty unusual at the time. And then I got hired by John Huey, who was up until recently, he was kind of the editorial director at Time/Life or Time Warner. He hired me to be a writer for this magazine he started called *Southpoint*. It was here in Atlanta, and it had this really crazy idea that you could do a Southern magazine, a magazine about the south that took in Southern culture but that was really essentially about Southern business. And that what unites Tuscaloosa and Roanoke, Virginia, is this shared business culture, which was completely … The thesis couldn't have been wrong. And the magazine was terrible. It was a really bad magazine. It was comically bad. It was just one of the worst magazines. But I got that job, and when that magazine ended, I mean it was as doomed as my sales career, I went and basically had written a piece, I had written one piece for the last issue of the magazine, but it never got published because the magazine got shut down. It was about Evander Holyfield, the fighter. And I sent that out. I didn't want to go back to *Atlanta Magazine*, although I could of. I wanted to try to see if I could write for national magazines. I was already 32 by this time. So I wanted to see if I could do that. And I got hired on the basis of that piece by *Life* and by *Sports Illustrated*. I had a dual contract there. And I had an odd experience. It was an odd experience in that *Life* was always pushing me to stretch out because Jay Lovinger, who was my editor there, was Gary's editor at *Inside Sports*, which is where Gary got started. And so he was really familiar with that, and he really wanted you to stretch out. And then I was also trying to stretch out at *Sports Illustrated* but Mark Mulvoy, I believe his name was, he was the editor there. He just wouldn't publish me. He would not publish me. I would do all these pieces and stuff, and all the under editors loved it. He was killing pieces left and right. He just wouldn't publish me. So it was weird. So I kind of went through that cycle and stuff and did some stuff, especially for *Life*, that I really liked. The *Sports Illustrated* stuff is OK. But then David Granger, I had written a piece for Eliot Kaplan at *GQ*, and he liked it. It was a piece about oysters. It was an essay. He liked it, but he left the magazine, and the piece was killed. When David took his place, he was looking through the slush pile and found that piece, and he just called me up right away. He was like, "I really like this piece." And I was like, "Great." And he was like, "No, you've got to understand, I really like this piece. This is exactly what I want in my magazine." He was just an editor who was trying to impress, like all other editors. Art Cooper was the editor of the magazine, but David was really ambitious. So he brought in me and all these other writers that nobody had heard of, and he made us his staff. To me, *GQ* was definitely the best magazine in the country for those years when Art was the head guy and David was his executive editor. That magazine was unbelievable. In terms of point of view and stuff, it was immediately... There was nothing I could do that was not encouraged, that was not tolerated. It was the opposite of *Sports Illustrated*. I was just doing really kind of crazy

stuff. I remember the first year there I got three national magazine nominations in a single year and won. And the next year was two more, and the next year was three more. I mean it was just huge. And then David went to *Esquire*, and I followed him over. It's been an interesting time since. The first piece I did for *Esquire* was Kevin Spacey, in which we outed him or supposedly outed him. I guess outed him. I don't know. We did this little toy dance around outing him. And that piece was one of the most universally reviled pieces of journalism that you can imagine. I went instantly from being journalistic hero to complete asshole overnight. And I'm still ... I've been at *Esquire* for 11 years, and I'm always amazed. But I've tried to really, in many ways, to push the envelope as much as I can. Once again, point of view really has a lot to do with all of that.

Now if you had to describe what point of view is, what would you say?
To me, point of view is making the story as personal as you can. I'm not saying write it in the first person. I'm not saying write it about yourself. I'm saying that you somehow locate what interests you about the story and what turns you on about the story, and make sure that that's actually in the story that you tell or at least shapes it. So that's to me what point of view is. I can give you an example. In one of the first stories that I wrote for David Granger at *GQ*, one of the first long stories, was a story that I wrote about an abortion doctor. It was called "The Abortionist." And writing style, I wrote that in a way that I haven't written even since, which was I wrote that under the spell ... I was reading Joseph Mitchell at the time, for the first time, and I was totally under the spell of that. And so I wrote it, what I thought, in that style. I don't know if anybody would look at that and say geez, he was aping Joseph Mitchell. But like if you read Alec Wilkinson and a lot of other *New Yorker* writers, they obviously write in the style of Joseph Mitchell. "The Abortionist" I don't think is so clear about it. Anyway, but the thing about that story was that I wrote that at a time when my wife and I were really, really trying to have a baby and not succeeding. There's not a single line or inkling or nothing in that story that would indicate that, and yet that was the driving force behind that story. Thomas Leigh at *Atlanta Magazine*, he said something to me the other day when I met him for the first time. He said that when he read that story, he felt that basically every sentence was intended to hurt, to strike a blow, and he was absolutely right. I was just kind of chopping wood in that thing. And I don't know exactly what I was chopping at, but I was chopping wood in some way. Every sentence was an ax, and I was swinging. That's what I mean by point of view. I mean that something creeps into the work that is very much at the heart of yourself, and you allow that to happen.

If you read the Fred Rogers story, the Mr. Rogers story, there were a lot of things that were going on in my life, they're not mentioned in the story, but I allowed... There's a chemistry that happened between me and Fred in that story that I simply allowed to happen. And that became part of the story. That's what I think it's all about. I know a lot of people don't agree with me on that. There's a writer I admire in *The New Yorker*, Larissa MacFarquhar. I think she's a really good writer, but at the same time, she spoke at Northwestern a couple years ago, and she was sort of bragging about the fact that she has no sort of personal connection at all ever with the people that she's writing about nor ever allows that to happen. That she's sitting there taking data and so on. I just don't understand how you can go about your business that way. It just seems unnatural to me.

Because to me, the people that you come into contact with affect you in a very, you know, way. To me, the good stories are the stories that take that into account. I've written definitely stories that are impersonal in a certain way, and that the thing that really interests me about the story, I don't manage to somehow get it into the story. And that's always the most frustrating story. You're like gee, I love it. I had a great time. And then the story is just dead on the page. That's always frustrating. But it doesn't happen that much.

Now how does this concept differ from publication to publication?

I've never written for anything, other than *Life* magazine, I've never written for anything but men's magazines, so I'm like Mr. men's magazine. It's sort of a self-parody in some ways. It's like, you know, men, men men. I've been writing so long in that way. I can't even imagine writing another way. And of course, men's magazines, they totally encourage you to have this point of view. So you know, I've been doing it, I've been writing for *Esquire* for 11 years. And then before that I wrote for *GQ* for five, for something like that.

Now would you say those publications are putting forth a lot of different points of view, very individualized with their writers?

I can tell you right now that I think we slip into, you write your own point of view, and then you happen to be writing for a men's magazine. I'm not particularly conscious of it, but I'm interested in those questions. I mean I'm interested in what defines manhood and those kinds of things. That just kind of creeps in there. I don't think that like Scott Raab looks at it as he has to sound like me, or that I have to sound like him. I don't think that, and I might be kidding myself here, but I don't look at *Esquire* as having like an institutional voice the way *The New Yorker* has an institutional voice.

Do you think that type of voice whether it be institutional or not is really finessed toward a target demographic and a target audience? Is that man that you're writing for in the back of your head?

No. I'm just writing like I write. And I think that it's almost like singing. When you sing, people sing a certain way. Gregg Allman sings his songs a certain way. He's a white blues singer. But I don't think he thinks I'm going to sing this like a white blue singer. He sings it as a white blues singer. And then some people respond to it, and some people don't. I write as a men's magazine writer, and some people respond to it or some people don't. I just do my singing the way I want to and hopefully people like it or don't.

Now was it difficult to get to this point?

I've always written in a certain tone of voice. No, it was always there. It was definitely there from the start. When I first wrote my first piece for *Atlanta Magazine*. It was on this local guy, this local sort of man about town columnist for the *Journal Constitution*. His name was Ron Hudspeth. And the story came out. I remember when I wrote the first sentence of it. I had a weekend to write the story, and I mean I had never really written for a general-interest publication ever in my life. I wrote as a first sentence, I wrote, "OK, I wanted to skewer him." And it was just like, where did that even come

from? I don't even know. Why was I able to take that chance, having never taken that chance before? The fact is I can't write any other way. I can't write New Yorkery style things. I find that difficult.

Along the way, what have editors said in terms of the very distinct tone that you take?

They've always liked it. I mean they've always liked it. But then once again, it's not like I went to *Home Beautiful* and tried to write for them. It's not like I went and tried to write for *Vogue*. I always wrote for a certain kind of publication. *Sports Illustrated* was difficult because the editor there, Mark Mulvoy, just didn't hear it. He just thought the stuff was weird. He thought it was gratuitously weird. And I don't think I was as good then at I became. So maybe it was gratuitously weird. But certainly his younger editors, the editors who worked for him, liked it. It just wasn't for him. But that was the only time. I've never had that.

What do you think are the advantages to using a point of view?

I just think it's intrinsic. It's intrinsic to the writing.

To magazine writing or all writing?

All writing. I can't imagine writing without that thing any more than I could imagine without sounding like me.

Are there disadvantages?

Yeah. A lot of people don't get it. It's very interesting seeing the response to things, things that I would think people would get. They don't and hate it. Or you become sort of, you see yourself, of course, the Internet, you're sort of like this figure that you don't even recognize. People talk about your stuff. Half the people like it, and half the people think you're the biggest asshole. And that's about it.

When you bring in this concept of objectivity, how does that play into this type of work? Is it just completely out the window or does it have a place?

I don't think it's out the window. Because I can't get around saying that Justin has a beard, that he's wearing frameless glasses. His hair is sandy. He's wearing a striped shirt, looking like Justin. That doesn't go away. The nuts and bolts of reporting don't go away. The factuality doesn't go a way. The sympathy that you might want to bring to it doesn't go away. There's a bit of difference between objectivity and truth. I saw the way objectivity happened in the newspaper world a couple years ago because I had written this story called "Mercenary," which was about this liar that I met. I went and the local Michigan South Bend writers were writing about this story that there was this lunatic working at the nuclear plant. He quit after the story came out. But he still had been working at the nuclear plant. There's no doubt in my mind that Zeke was absolutely frickin crazy. There was a writer there who talked to me about the story, and I told him. Then he talked to Zeke about the story, and he was like, "I'm not crazy and this and that," and that's the way the story came out. It was this sort of writer says he's crazy; guy says he's not crazy. And that's it. When there were all sorts of avenues that were available to this writer to prove that he was crazy. He had tried to fool FBI agents. He was just

absolutely out of his mind and lied to every single person he met. But yet it became a my word and his word thing. I read it, and I was just like is this what it is? Is this what objectivity is? Objectivity in that level seemed the antithesis of journalism. It seemed the antithesis of truth. It seemed the antithesis of anything. It just seemed lazy ultimately. I think objectivity becomes a lazy response in a lot of ways. To me, trying to tell the truth or trying to be fair, to me all those things have very little to do with objectivity. Because to me, you have to acknowledge somewhere along the line that you are one person who is trying to tell a story. And it's ultimately going to be your story. To me that should be acknowledged in some level somewhere in that piece.

Where do you get to a point in your fact gathering where you're comfortable sitting down and writing this, expressing a point of view, formulating the story?

It really depends. I mean I have a story that came out now about Shepard Smith that was basically, he's the anchor at Fox. The story's fine. It was a 4,000-word story, which is short for me. It was really written in a very small window of time. I had three days. I knew what I wanted to do with the story to a degree. I did it. And that happens with celebrity pieces all the time. Shepard Smith wasn't really a celebrity piece, but it was sort of written more or less like one. And then there were other stories that I don't think I'm satisfied unless I talk to a hundred people. It really sort of depends on it. I'm going to be doing a story about a politician, I think, for the July issue that I'm sure will require a lot. I had an interesting experience last summer in that I was assigned to write about Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs is not a friend of *Esquire*. We had gotten into a big battle years before. It was very clear that I was never going to get Apple to participate, and, in fact, they did not. They did everything they could to stop me from writing the story. And so I called a lot of people. And a lot of people didn't call me back. Eventually, I had to write a piece. I don't know if you've ever read the story. I really like the story.

Like a standard write around then?

Oh, it's a total write around. Total write around. But it was more of a write around in that I had a conception of his character, and I wrote that conception of his character. And I wasn't about to be stopped from doing it. The reporting was there to give me a conception of his character and to understand him more. I was going to do that thing no matter what. And it came out pretty good.

And what was the response?

People really liked that story, I think, in general.

Does point of view influence story selection and what you agree to take on?

Listen, the business is changing in a huge way. And as far as what you agree to take on, I mean you're asked to do a lot more stories now rather than writing these big sort of obsessional pieces. That's what's definitely influencing what I'll take on. I'll not take on a story that I'm not interested in, that I'm not interested in some way personally. I wrote about Shep Smith because I was really interested in Fox News, and I really wanted to go behind the curtain. I really wanted to go behind that curtain and did. To me, story selection in an ideal world is the same as point of view. There is no difference. You write

about what you're interested in, and then you write about what interests you about the thing that you're interested in. To me they're both the same thing. Point of view to me is the kind of fundamental thing. I can't even imagine doing it with out. To me, it's at the center of it rather than the outside. I don't see where it's added. I don't see where it's layered on. To me, it's what you start with.

Is it unconscious or is it conscious?

Totally unconscious. You start writing sentences. And that's not to say that I don't struggle to find voices, and I don't struggle to find a way to tell the story. That is the struggle. How do you find the voice that expresses your point of view? How do you structure the thing? How do you tell this? That's a huge struggle for me always. I think my voice changes story to story more than most writers. I've done all sorts of crazy things. I mean, I wrote a story in rap.

Why'd you decide to do that?

Because I couldn't write it any other way. It's really people ask me those questions about why did I decide to do it that way. Like when I wrote this Michael Stipe story that I still love and most people really, really hate. I started writing it that way because I was kind of struggling with it. Then I wrote the thing, and I saw it, and it was there, and I followed it, and it was done.

What do you try not to do with your point of view and your voice?

I try not to impose it on the story. I try to let it come out of the material rather than imposed on the material. A good example of that is when I was with *GQ* I wrote a story about a murderer, Tony Mobley. It was called "Pulling the Trigger." It's a pretty good story. It was a huge breakthrough for me. I wrote the story very fast, and I wrote it completely in Tony's voice. Completely. I didn't quote Tony once in the whole story. Not once. But I sort of became Tony and then wrote the story that way. And Tony was really profane, really charming, sociopathic, crazy, bisexual, hustler guy, and so I had his voice in my head, but I also sort of had to create a voice to sort of match that. But my next story was about Joe Montana, the quarterback, and so I start to write that story and I'm sort of entering into Joe Montana's head, and Joe Montana's saying, "fuck all these people" and all this kind of stuff. It was Tony Mobley again. I was having Tony Mobley speak through Joe Montana, and I don't think Joe would have liked it, and I don't think I would have liked it. It was wrong. So that's what I don't want to do. I did a story recently for the December issue for the magazine on a scientist named Mark Roth. That story's written in Mark's voice. It was that kind of thing. I sort of entered into it. Right after that I had to write the essay in this issue. They are two different kinds of writing.

Now how did the essay come about?

I was experiencing free fall like so many other Americans. My mom was sick, and she was dying. I was going back and forth each day to the hospital to be with her. There was that one day where my mother was dying, clearly, the House had rejected the first bailout bill, and the stock market fell by 800 points. And in Atlanta, Georgia, you couldn't get gas. You couldn't get gas here. Of all those things, I mean nothing, I'm

scared because of that little experience. I'm really frightened of the day when you can't get gas. Man, it was crazy. So I called up David Granger and was like what the hell just happened? David being David was like there you go. Can you write an essay on that? To say what happened over the last eight years is not an easy thing to do. So I wrote a draft that was just sort of a get your ideas out there draft. Then I wrote that. They're two completely separate things, but it was good to have a couple drafts before I actually wrote the piece. That's also why point of view questions are interesting to me because there's a lot of writers, a lot of reporters who wouldn't be caught dead writing an essay. And I consider myself sort of a natural essayist, that's where my inclinations drive me. I've written a number of them. I'll probably write a lot more now because David really wants his writers in the magazine more and more.

Why do you think that is?

Why does he want his writers in the magazine more and more? Because he's paying them, and he wants them to ... He doesn't want to pay freelancers.

So it's purely money?

I think it's money, and I think the blog world and everything else has made David realize that maybe the best way to write is often. So rather than sort of have these event pieces, just to have his writers voices in the magazines as much as possible. So I think there's a couple of different reasons for it. But anyway. So I write essays a lot, and I write essayistic sections of stories all the time. I've always done that. I always have a section that's sort of essayistic.

Do you think that point of view also comes forth with the structure and how it's presented? What does it say to have this starting right here? It's before the TOC. It's before everything.

I don't know. I've never seen that happen. It's kind of neat. It's definitely different.

How do you think point of view affects credibility with your readers?

That's a good question. I think that having a point of view, I think that ... I don't know. That's a good question. I think that the magazines that are most respected now are the magazines that have a, I don't mean just magazines, the journalism that's respected now comes with an institutional voice like with *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*. To me, they're operating in the same place, to a degree, in that they have an institutional voice. And it's funny because you have the fragmentation of the blog world, and you have the fragmentation of all these journalists speaking as pundits and this and that. And yet the thing that people seem to crave is a certain amount of an institutional stamp on things. To me, a certain dullness. People seem to like that and to be really reassured by that. Or it tells them that they're reading quality stuff instead of the shit that's out there. So I think that when one really tries to put forth a point of view, I think you sort of lose the benefit of the doubt a little bit. And you know, people either really respond to it or really, really hate it, which is sort of what it's intended for anyway. You're trying to connect to people in some sort of visceral way. And if they don't like it,

you find out pretty quickly. As far as credibility, I don't know. I don't really think about credibility too much. I do know some people think you're great. Some people think you're a joke.

Are there types of stories that taking a strong point of view would work better for than others?

We're just going to go back to the beginning. To me, every story's different. Every story has to be approached differently. Even just the question of whether to do a story in first person or not is like a huge decision. And so what kind of voice are you going to do? Are you going to do a formal ... Are you going to wear a sweatshirt or are you going to wear tailored clothes? What are you going to do? That's all. There's a zillion different decisions that you make in a course of a story. Generally, I find that I just write what's available to me. You connect to the material so that you can ultimately connect to the reader, and that's the measure of your success or not. Does it come alive on the page or not? Does the point of view that you have, does it bring the characters and the issues to life, or does it swallow them, or does it deaden then? And that's my struggle in every single story. There's not a story that I write that doesn't have that struggle as the backdrop. So it's always different. I wrote a story this summer that, you know, I probably wrote with less point of view than any story I've ever written. It's called " The Six-Letter Word that Changes Everything." The story about murder. When I wrote that, it's not that I didn't connect with the material. I had trouble connecting to the material on the page. All my point of view stuff just seemed extraneous. I had so much material. I had so much stuff that I wanted to say. When I first wrote that story, my first take was 20,000 plus words, and I was halfway through. I was screwed. I'm fucked here. I have a story that I have too much material. I have no idea how to control it. I have no idea. And all my essays and points of view were just adding to this mess. So I wound up writing this story with short sentences and very little quote on quote "writing" and very little point of view. That was a time when I abandoned it. I have to say, I think because of that, my editor was not pleased. Because it didn't have more of my stamp on it. He didn't feel like I owned the material. I thought I did as far as ... I was certainly well versed. There was a guy in there, Michael Hensley, who was the leader of this thing. It was hard to figure out what to say about Michael because we had gotten to be somewhat close writing it. And yet at the same time, I did believe that he was a murderer. And it was really tough. It was really, really tough. A lot of times out of those conflicts really great stuff happens. But sometimes it's, you can deal with it. I know people who love that story. I know people who think it's the best thing I've ever written. But it's not.

How long did it take you to report and write that?

It took a long time. I started traveling to Alaska around this time last year. And then I finished the story I guess in early May. So a long time. But I took a crack at writing it, and it didn't happen. I had this huge, wordy thing. Plus I had to go back. I didn't have the officer's point of view. They wouldn't talk to me at the time, and then they would. So I went back and that helped. That helped a lot. Made the story definitely more authoritative.

What am I missing?

I find it interesting listening to you because point of view to me seems almost to you like something that gets ushered in. It seems like a decision whereas to me it seems like fate.

David Katz, Contributing Editor for *Esquire*

January 30, 2009
10:30 a.m. at the Tea Lounge in Brooklyn, New York
45 minutes

Will you tell me first a bit about your journalism background?

I guess I worked for the paper at Berkeley. That was my first job in journalism. Then I swore I'd never do it professionally, and I ended up doing it professionally. Then I worked for *Wired* magazine in San Francisco for a little bit. And then I moved out here, and I worked for *Vanity Fair* as a fact checker. Then very briefly for that Tina Brown *Talk* magazine as a junior editor. Then *Time Out New York* for a while as a features editor. Then to *Esquire* starting as an associate editor for five and a half years to articles editor, then now to contributing editor.

And when did that switch take place?

That switch just took place. That transition happened in October for a variety of reasons but mostly cutbacks. Well, two things happened at the same time. They needed to cutback and my friend AJ Jacobs and I, who is also an editor at *Esquire*, sold a show to CBS. So that's what I've been doing now pretty much. We actually just turned it into the network yesterday. So now we're waiting in the next day or two to hear whether they'll pick it up or not. So I'm a little on edge.

Is it a sitcom?

It's a single camera. Yeah, more or less a sitcom. We'll see. It's based on a book I did when I was at *Esquire*, a little novelty book called *Things a Man Should Never Do Past 30*. It's about two guys that work at a men's magazines. Kind of taken from our lives. One of the guys is kind of based on AJ, and one is slightly based on me. And now I am writing for *Esquire*. I have two features. Next week I'm starting a feature, and two weeks later I have another feature. So it was kind of thank god, actually, just in time.

In your own words, how would you describe the concept of point of view?

I think it's your authorial intent. It's a tonal thing, but it's also ... I don't really believe in this myth of objectivity. But certainly, there are publications that strive for that, and I think that's an important thing to strive for. I don't dismiss it like some people do like, "Oh, you can't be objective." Like if you look at a newspaper, they're trying to present in their news stories, the facts. I think that at a publication like *Esquire* with narrative journalism, half of it is entertainment however you define that whether that means entertainment by a really thoughtful, long feature about something very serious or

entertainment as humor or anything like that. People can get their facts elsewhere, so I mean to me point of view is largely ... does *Esquire* have a point of view? I think its point of view is to be a literary and entertainment magazine, and within that, each writer should have their own individual point of views on the world and bring that to the story. That's what you try to do as an editor, at least at a magazine that respects writers. When I was a story editor, that's what I did. As a writer, that's what I like to work with. There are editors at some magazines that just try to meld everything into one voice. That's not necessarily bad as a business model. Like *Time Out*, that's what we did. I would rewrite everyone's stuff, but you would work with really young writers who aren't very seasoned or necessarily very good. And some that were. And *Esquire's* obviously very different. Of course, I don't know where the future lies. Obviously, *Esquire's* struggling very much right now. You know it's hard to be that type of magazine. I assume that we will survive because it's a pretty iconic brand. But it's dark. I know you don't want to hear that because you're just graduating. But you know other things are there that are going to replace it. I don't think it's the end of print or anything like that. It's definitely changing though. I'm sure *Esquire* will survive. It's just going to have a couple hard years. Like, we eliminated five editors or so.

Has the size of the publication decreased in terms of pages as well?

Yeah. There's not a lot of edit. There's not a lot of room. My job there primarily was finding new writers. I used to do kind of front-of-book stuff. And as a general story editor, I did a lot of their features. And there's just not that much space, but also other than our core of staff writers, you can't use that many new or other kind of expensive writers or key writers because times are tight, and it's going to be that way for a while, like freelancing. I'm lucky that I can work there because I have an in.

You mentioned that at Esquire, writers have their own points of view but that at other places, that's just definitely not the case. Why do you think that is that way?

I think that's the DNA of the magazine definitely. I think that we push the writers to have a distinct voice. Point of view and voice are kind of, to me, extremely interlinked. Unless you're talking about point of view literally like you said. And we are a magazine that really emphasizes voice above all else I would say, sometimes to the detriment of the story. If we err, we err on that side. Somewhere in between would be *The New Yorker* where there is still kind of a certain journalistic template that they follow. The writers, when they're writing for *The New Yorker*, don't go crazy. Other magazines that push it more would be like *Harper's*. Because that's really all you've got when you're doing that. Or else why would someone turn to *Esquire* for a certain story when they could read that same story elsewhere? In other words, you're not getting the news from it, so you better have a great ... And so that's all dependent on the writers. If you don't have a good voice, you can't really impart that. Certain magazines though like let's say *Lucky* or *Time Out*, that's a totally different thing. Those are service magazines, and what they're trying to do is brand all the content together. It's not about the writers. The writers are meaningless, I don't even know if they, I mean they have bylines, but it's not ... They're different things. It's kind of like saying, not all televisions... There's no universal print. They just happen to be printed on paper, but there's not very much similar between those

magazines. In a way I think also now blogging is largely about voice. It's largely about the individual. In a way I think, I don't know if that's good or bad for magazines that are more voice-oriented. It might be good. It's just that people aren't used to reading long things online right now. I think that will change though, not necessarily online like we think of it but the way things are delivered and stuff like that. There's always going to be long... There are always going to be people who can read. Just like there are people who can listen to the radio. I listen to the radio all day long, and no one thought that people would still listen to the radio four years ago. But I think that for the magazine to survive, the voice either of the magazine or ... I mean, there's an ethos to *Esquire*. Like you do know it has a certain thing even though what that is comprised of is all the writer's voices. Like *The Economist*. *The Economist* has a distinct point of view. You read it, and you know you're not reading *Time*. And *Time* is always like why aren't we ... We are just as good. We have better reporting. We have far further reach. I would say they get the unfair rap because Time actually is, in many ways, a much better magazine then let's say *The Economist*. It's much more thoroughly reported, I think. The stories are often much deeper. Like *The Economist* can read very breezy. I want more. But people read it because they like the tone. And that's what *Time* and *Newsweek* ... they don't have that. They try in certain sections, and it just comes off as stupid or sophomoric.

They're pushing for that a lot. That's actually a huge part of this, Richard Stengel's huge push toward having a point of view.

Well I think that's a hugely important thing. They need to ... there's still a need, and I hope to God like it remains. We need *The New York Times*, we need *The Wall Street Journal*. But those are news sources. That's different than a magazine. A magazine is not a news source. Probably the best story I edited last year, which is definitely worth reading is this guy Luke Dittrich. He's a young writer still on contract there. And he wrote about this guy who was on "To Catch A Predator." You know that show? He was a liberal prosecutor. Basically he never went to the house, he was obviously a pedophile. But they tried to lure him, and he didn't go. So they went to his house, and he knew that his life was basically over. And so he killed himself while they were outside. And it's an amazing story. The story itself took place a year before we published that. It wasn't like you could read about it in a newspaper. We basically shut down that show with our story because of the way it was written. It's a narrative. It's not hyperbolic at all. It's very understated, but it's just ... like the point of view of the story doesn't have to necessarily be the words or necessarily the tone in the sense of you think of it like very something or very funny or very progressive. It can also just be the structure of the story. That's what this is. This is a measured building of character, so you understand this guy is human. I would actually read that story. It's a pretty interesting way of seeing things. It's long, too. That's the kind of thing that's like 14,000 words. But yeah, I think all those things play into it. I'll say that Granger is extremely, that's who he is. There was this story that I tried to get through so many times last year. And he'd be like it's good, but that's kind of like a magazine story. And to him, that's the worst insult. At the same time, the sadness is that to sell covers and things like that, we have to put sexy women on or celebrities and how

does that compromise the general magazine point of view, I don't know. I mean, that's a whole other thing.

That's an industry-wide question.

Yeah, certainly. I mean, *The New Yorker* doesn't have to do it. *The New York Times Magazine* doesn't have to do it. But *The New York Times Magazine* is a good example of a magazine that I don't think does very well with having an identity. I guess it doesn't need to because it's part of *The New York Times*. It's sold with *The New York Times*. I usually find the writing very kind of flaccid or newsy or boring. I mean if they get a good writer, but you know.

I wonder why that is.

Probably the editor or something. Or the fact that it's *The New York Times*. I'm sure there's a million reasons. It's a weekly, which is hard. A lot of times, even though *The New Yorker* is a great publication, a lot of the stories aren't that well written. But they also work on stories for a long time, particularly. And they have some really amazing writers. Christopher Hitchens is a great example of a guy who it's all about his perspective. But he's extremely bright. And to me, that's a perfect call. That's what magazines are essentially going to be about or are about now. Do people still care? That's for you to decide, I guess. That's why I'm trying to get into television, which is also dying.

How do you use your point of view in your writing?

I generally write first person, humor stuff. It's a little more self-indulgent about me. The point of view is that of a fish out of water type of thing. AJ does that as well. We both do the kind of immersion journalism type of thing where we'll do a stunt. He's the poster child for that. The year of living in Liverpool. The year of… His previous book is *The Know-It-All*. So those are all boring subjects in a way, but what he's doing is wrapping his life around that. The two stories that I'm working on right now are … I actually have to go lunch at this place, this sandwich shop, because I'm going to apprentice there for a week for this issue that we're doing. It's a short-order type of place. So I'll have to be a short-order cook. I have to go talk to them. Then after that I'm going to sell BMWs for like two weeks. I'm actually really looking forward to that. It's for the Cars issue. But both of those things are all about my experiences, a little bit self-indulgent. I guess the point of view could be obnoxious, but you know it's kind of how you do it. But those are all point of view. There's nothing newsy or inherently interesting about those stories.

Out of curiosity, are you given those assignments or do you come up with them?

Those ones I was given.

Did you come up with the one with the weird suit?

No, I was definitely given that. You know, given, offered. I'm offered more than given. For the sandwich shop one, I'm trying to decide where to kind of apprentice. It's a whole story about that. So I might do it there, I might do it as this diner over here. I was just asked if I wanted to do it because no one else really wants to do it. It's a commitment, and I just find it hilarious. I have a friend who did that right after college, sold cars. It's like the hardest job ever.

And in this economy it has to be vicious.

Especially with BMWs. So it's going to be interesting. He later said that if you can sell a car, basically you can sell anything to anyone. It is the ultimate kind of bare knuckles salesmanship, which I don't really care about because I'm not a salesman, but it's still important. I don't know what that has to do with point of view. But certainly, that is an inherent... like the Thom Browne thing again. If some fashionista, or whatever the male version of that is, was wearing the suit, that wouldn't be a story. It's who you're pairing it with.

Do you think that point of view is finessed toward a target demographic, a target audience?

Yeah, it has to be. We write for men of certain education as does *GQ* as does *Details*. That's mostly the only thing that unites all the stories. It all has to hit that. We're not going to write a story for women. It might be about women, but not for women. That doesn't mean women don't enjoy it. We mostly have male writers. In fact, all of our staff writers are men.

What about the writers?

All of the assigning story editors are men. There is the wrangler, whatever you want to call her, she's the person who gets the talent, the covers, the stars. She's called Specials Projects Editor or something like that. She's a woman. And then the Editorial Director, who's more personnel, does the budget and all that, she's a woman. But all of the story editors are men. That's *Esquire*. That's not at *GQ*. There are two editors. But now there's actually only one, my friend Catherine.

I guess it kind of makes sense.

There's a lot of women's magazines, so there are a lot of places where women work. It's not necessarily essential, but it makes sense.

Is this direction, audience and point of view addressed in the mission statement?

I don't know if we really have a mission statement. It's a pretty bold magazine. See that's the thing. There probably is a mission statement that the advertising department uses to sell ads. But no one in the editorial department pays attention to that. Because it's a general-interest magazine for men. That's what makes it very different for a magazine that's not general interest. That very much is a design magazine for young twenty somethings. We're literally a magazine for men by normal men or something like

that. It's not *The New Yorker*. We need to have younger, sexy women but also those few, big important stories. You know, that mix. But more specific magazines, and I think more and more this is the way everything is moving, to niche. It's all about who you're targeting and who you're speaking to. Even like a *Maxim* magazine is directed very specifically to young men, and then those guys grow up and the Internet comes on, and that magazine is on its last leg. We have a pretty broad statement I would say as opposed to *GQ*, which *GQ* is more fashion oriented. We don't do as much fashion, but we still do. Their tag line is like "Be sharp, live smart." They have fashion in their tag line. Ours is "Man at his best," which essentially is meaningless. I mean it's important. But it's service. I mean since it's a 75-year-old magazine it kind of defies the brand a little bit. Although maybe not with advertisers. I'm sure advertisers want to see more fashion. But you know like *Men's Vogue* was a men's fashion magazine, and that didn't pan out. I don't know. We're an unusual case, but usually it's very much embedded.

Why do you think magazines use point of view? As we're going toward niche and certain target demographics, is it going to be more prevalent?

Yes because it's more segmented now than it's ever been. And it will continue to be. You're not going to just have a few publications with circulations of a million. You'll have hundreds of publications with circulations of a thousand. And it probably won't be actual paper publications. I mean it's already happened. But I would say yes, 100 percent. Some place like Gawker or some place like that, I think you look at this, I don't think that's going to see any growth. But it has a pretty big, robust following that's already there. Who's going to not be interested? There's going to be a whole new, young group of people interested in media gossip, I guess. They'll probably move on to something else. My parents aren't going to read that. So even though it has a sizable audience, it's still pretty niche. It's not going to expand. There's just too much choice out there, and I think that if you want to speak to your audience, you have to be more intimate with them. Importantly, speak to them using your voice and your point of view that they relate to it. You can't worry too much about speaking to too many people. That's the big difference. It's a smaller club. It's like with your friends. You all have a similar point of view, but you can't be friends with everyone.

What are the advantages to using a point of view?

To speak to a certain audience. To relate to your readership, I would say is the number one.

And what are the disadvantages?

Alienating. Absolutely. Are you thinking about it from an economic standpoint or as a writer? As a writer, what's the point of not using a point of view? Because there's fun in writing like that. There's definitely different types ... some people are journalists, some people are writers, some people are ... I've always been an editor or a writer, but never like a really hardcore fact-finding journalist. I don't really enjoy reporting that much in that traditional sense like picking up the phone. I don't care about scoops and stuff like that. I don't think for reporters, that point of view is exciting. But to someone who is a writerly writer or a humorist, it's everything. You hope to entrance someone

enough to keep reading it, to come back. Relatability. But like I said, the disadvantage is that you alienate people, which happens all the time.

Is point of view always in conflict with objectivity?

I think you have to acknowledge that point of views are inherent. Objectivity is basically a myth, but you can strive for it, and if you do, which I think is important. At certain publications, that is that publication's point of view. *The New York Times*, obviously it's a left leaning or if you want to call it liberal leaning, but it still strives for news objectivity. CNN, too. That is a point of view. But of course they still have their own brand and identity. I think readers are clearly smart enough. Like with Fox or the *Journal* that's a conservative publication, and that speaks to a certain audience. The *Journa*l doesn't really want, the editorial board is conservative. But the news gatherers, the guys on the ground, the reporters, I have friends there that are reporters and they're not at all like the editorial board members. The paper is very objective when it comes to news.

How does point of view affect story selection and other large-scale decisions at Esquire?
The core thing is that it fits in with the magazine's ethos, but other than that its is it a good story? Is it unique? Is it epic? Is it important? Is it funny? Is it not just another stupid men's magazine story that you've read a thousand times? An incredible story that would appeal to a 60-year-old women would not end up in *Esquire*.

How does this all affect credibility? Or does it?
If you're Al Jazeera, you're not going to find a lot of credibility with other publications and vice versa. Even if they report the exact same story. It's just your brand is striving to … literally you could have the same story in both media, and it would be beat up in different ways. It's just about the organization. So clearly it affects it.

How do blogs affect point of view and what you can do in your writing?
I can't really speak much to blogging. I wouldn't even want to go there. I think it's dramatically changing the landscape. Everything is going digital. I think eventually you won't distinguish between different types of writing.

From the editing perspective, how would you deal with a writer who is having trouble with point of view?
That's really hard. At *Time Out*, we would rewrite it to make it fun. At *Esquire*, because we're really interested in writer's voice, when that story doesn't have it, it's pretty much a lost cause. And I've had stories that are like that. They just didn't take it to the next level.

Are there stories where point of view works better for than others?
Yeah. Definitely. Some stories that are more feature-based are just important in and of themselves. We have this guy who writes for us who is a military specialist, and he wrote a story last year that was this big story, but it didn't, he's not much of a writer. But because it was newsworthy, it was the … I'm actually forgetting his name … It was a

huge thing. He makes it all about the administration. He was going to retire anyway. Thomas Barnett is the writer. That was a big deal. It wasn't the writing. It was just the content itself. It was a news breaking story. Tom Junod wrote the story, "The Falling Man," but he spent six months researching it. And it's written in a very writerly prose. That wasn't news breaking at all. It was a story itself. That's where it's essential.

What am I missing?
I don't know. That's fairly exhaustive.

Todd Purdum, National Editor for *Vanity Fair*

February 25, 2009
10 a.m. at Starbucks in Washington, D.C.
1 hour and 15 minutes

That does make sense, and I know what you're talking about. I spent 23 years at *The New York Times*, and I was taught there, as I'm sure you were taught in your work at the paper in college, that objectivity or sort of a neutral voice was really one of the great achievements of journalism in the 20th century. The *Colonel McCormick's Tribune*, whose opinions carried from the front page editorial cartoon to the editorial page to all the news pages in between, or the *Chandler's Los Angeles Times* or the Hearst papers that had highly sort of partisan individualized takes on things. Those were considered to have been basically not a force for good in American life and democracy. Especially from World War II on the rise of the, some people call it the cult of objectivity, but the rise of the paradigm of objectivity as the norm was seen as a big achievement and something that was really important to the credibility of newspapers and journalism in general, and that was a tool and service for society. I think what's happened in the last 10 years especially, for a lot of reasons, and I suppose you could argue that it started longer ago than that. It could have started in Vietnam and Watergate when at some level, that kind of journalism hit its high watermark. But there's a way in which those tools, I think, are sometimes inadequate to cover, and especially to cover politics, in an age when not everything can be reduced to on the one hand, on the other hand. Sometimes, as Tobias says in *Fiddler on the Roof*, there is no other hand. Fox News has risen on the right as a journalism of affirmation, and now I guess MSNBC is in some ways coming up on that same model on the left. But Senator Moynihan of New York used to say that everyone's entitled to his or her own opinions but not to his or her own facts. And there's a way in which the Bush Administration, in particular, it seemed to me, tried aggressively to create a set of red facts and blue facts, so that you had to believe their version of events, which was often at odds with what could be considered objective reality. The mainstream media's repetition of what it saw as the objective reality was not enough to counter the relentless kind of march, and their efforts marginalized frankly the mainstream media.

The one thing I have noticed in my fledgling magazine career is, I guess really two things, one is it is a much more natural way to tell a story with a point of view because we all have a point of view anyway. And just as the inverted pyramid style is the

most unnatural way to tell a story, you would never sit around a dinner table and have a lead in which you gave all the most important stuff right away. You build suspense, you tell the story, you say a long time ago. I often think in the Wizard of Oz, where the Tin Man says "A long time ago, I was walking down the yellow brick road, and suddenly it started to rain." That's a much more natural way to tell a story than three men were killed by a city bus this morning because no one would say that. I think it has its real advantages. In some ways, if it's done well, and it's done on the basis of really thorough reporting and not just attitudinizing, then I think it ultimately, and I don't want to sound obnoxious about it, it can get to a higher truth. It can get to something deeper. I don't know for example if you've seen the collection, there are two collections now out of the magazine writing of Marjorie Williams, she was a *Vanity Fair* staff writer and a *Washington Post* staff writer before that. She knew David Von Drehle well. David wrote her obituary. She died of cancer four years ago, really prematurely at 47. She was famous in Washington, particularly for her profiles of people. Google her, and you'll find them. She did just what you said. She combined reporting, voice, sometimes first person, interaction. She wrote a famous profile of Dick Darman, who was the director of the office of management and budget, in which he was giving her a tour of his house. He opened the closet and said all the contents are off the record. She recounted all this. That actually might have been a piece for the *Washington Post* Style section. It's much, much more natural and realistic to share those things with the reader. They build your credibility with the reader as opposed to suppressing them, which is what you tend to do with straight newspaper reporting in which you are supposed to be a non-presence. Your receipt of the information is supposed to not be discussed, and the process by which you, the sort of complicated dance that you undergo, is not supposed to be revealed or discussed in any way. And the truth is it's more honest when it is at a certain level. It's definitely more honest.

Now if you had to describe this concept of point of view, how would you?

I guess for me, one of the things that's been a challenge to learn, in newspaper writing, you're not supposed to have a point of view. In magazine writing, you're not only allowed to have a point of view, you absolutely have to have a point of view because, and that doesn't mean, you're just supposed to substitute your opinion for information or facts, but it means that at the end of a 5,000- or 10,000-word magazine article, the reader should really know, must know what you think and feel about it because otherwise it's too much effort to invest in you if they don't know. One of the differences is that in an article of that length or rendition if done well is often 1/4 or 1/3 of a way toward a small book on the subject. Its aspiration is higher to say this will be relevant today and relevant tomorrow and relevant six months from now, and with luck, can still be read with profit six years from now. Where it's very, very, very rare that a newspaper could really be read except as a historical artifact six years from now. And you know magazines themselves sit around a lot longer. They sit in doctors' offices. They sit in your parent's house. They're looked at by your relatives on Christmas vacation when the July issue is still out. So they have to last longer. I guess the essential difference is that point of view is really a necessity in magazine writing.

Now your job at Vanity Fair, you're the national editor?

Yes, which is kind of a misnomer. Almost everybody there has a title with the word *editor*, but I don't have any editorial function at all. I just cover politics, and I'm based in Washington. At one point, Graydon wanted to call me the Washington editor, and he said we've never had a Washington editor. I said yes you have, it used to be Dee Dee before we moved to Los Angeles. Oh, well then let's not do that. So we came up with national editor. But it just as easily could have been political editor. It's really more accurate to say I'm a political correspondent or something. And then I don't only cover politics. But anyway. So that's just the title.

In your writing, how do you try to use point of view?

Well, for example, I can think of a couple recent pieces. Well not so recent I guess. In 2006, I wrote a piece about Karl Rove. It was probably in the December issue of 2006. And then in the February 2007 issue, there was a piece about John McCain. And in the piece about Karl Rove, he just happens to be our neighbor down the street here. He lives up the hill from us. One time we were on vacation, and we noticed our newspapers had been carried up to the front steps. And later I was calling him for something for *The New York Times*, and he said you know, you have the second most expensive house on the block after Don Riegle, who was a corrupt former senator, and you can't carry your papers to the front door. He was razing us about carrying the papers. Anyway. When I came to write this piece about him, I made our interactions as neighbors part of the piece, and I made his interactions with other people in the neighborhood part of the piece, too. Some friends of ours had a soapbox derby car that the father, who was a republican lobbyist, had built at a team building retreat for his lobbying firm and named it K-ROVE-R, which is kind of a combination of K Street and Rove. So Karl later found out that the priest of the church across the street had seen it. But the guy was mystified because it was under what he described as a plastic tarp. And I said he didn't understand how Karl could have known. Karl wrote this guy a note saying may your course always be swift, may you always be victorious. And Welles, our friend, said I didn't understand how he knew because it was under this heavy plastic tarp. So I wrote that as a kind of a way to illustrate that Karl created this whole micro target of politics in finding just what he had to push to make you work for George Bush. He sort of approached the whole neighborhood in the same way. Here's Welles with this soapbox derby car. He sent him a little note, one of Karl's ticks is that he collects vintage stamps, he sent this guy with this little yellow bomb of a soap box car stamps that had a bobsled and something else and other things involving racing. So then Karl got all excited, saying it wasn't a plastic tarp, it was a clear plastic sheet. Anyway. The point is I included a lot of that interaction in the piece, which I never ever would have done in a newspaper article because they wouldn't have let you.

Another thing he did once. The only time he was ever at our house was at a great, big party for a *New York Times* editor who was being promoted, and we had this book called *Bush's Brain* on the bookshelf. And someone pointed out that Karl had taken the book off the shelf and written in the front of it "Don't believe a word in this piece of trash." Karl Rove and then the date. So I mean I put that in, too. So that's one example. Another example is in this piece about John McCain. It was written in the fall of 2006 when he was out campaigning in what turned out to be the most disastrous midterm

elections. Even then he was struggling to do what we saw him do all the way in the general election, which his square his own impulses as a maverick Republican with what the party demanded of him as an orthodoxy that he had to adhere to be the nominee. And it was very, very hard for him to come out in favor of the wall for immigration because he thought it was a stupid idea. I followed him around for several days in both Iowa and New Hampshire, and he let me sit with him and talk with him alone on the plane or in the car with him. And I recounted very candidly our own interactions. And I would say something like I said to him, and he said to me, and I said to him, and again that was a very ... I told that story the way I would tell you over a cup of coffee, or the way I would tell my parents or my family and not in a kind of magisterial, top down, omniscient kind of way. Those are two examples of point of view. I suppose you could say in the Bill Clinton piece there was point of view because I brought to the story my own experience of having watched him over many years and also my own psychic trajectory if you will of mostly admiring him and still admiring things about him and also being increasingly disgusted by him. I put that, and I put myself in the story as an example of probably a not uncommon phenomenon that over the last year he somehow just went a bit too far for people who previously thought highly of him. I also made that very personal but not in a gratuitously personal sense. But I put myself in the picture as someone who was thinking about and reacting to him.

Now in that piece, in particular, how did you reach the level of confidence that you must have had that you could say all of these things?

That's an interesting question. Obviously there was a lot as you saw, tremendous, it caused a lot of controversy. And a lot of controversy focused on the number and volume of anonymous sources. My editor at *Vanity Fair* is a wonderful man named Cullen Murphy, who was for many years the editor of *Atlantic Monthly*. And he's just a really smart, the best editor I've ever had. He's interested in a lot of things. His father, for many years, drew a comic strop, and Cullen Murphy wrote the story. So he's serious and funny. I think in some ways this piece was so carefully edited and so carefully worded and put through a rigorous fact checking process. We had persuaded ourselves we were making a pretty mild statement of the obvious. And it was received as a shocking, "Oh my God, how could you say this?" And part of the issue was the timing of it. It was really in some way conceived in the thought that Hillary would be the nominee. And he would turn out to be a very controversial problem for her as indeed he turned out to be. Barack Obama forced him to do in the process of her becoming secretary of state many things that this article suggests he should have done a long time ago and could have done on his own. And in fact, he did do them all, and it wasn't so painful for him. What I naively thought people would focus on, and some people did focus on this was that If I had written this, for whatever it's worth, whatever reputation I've accumulated over time, that they would assume that the sources I was quoting were in fact, I did say in here some place, I think, that basically there were no sort of hostile Republican operatives who were my sources. These were all current or former aides or supporters, people who fundamentally liked and supported him and were very disappointed in him. And I realize at some level that I don't think I realized at the time, some of them were very wiling to talk to me because they must have come to feel it was the only way to get his attention

because when they tried to talk to him in private, as one person did about these rumors, they were shut down by intermediaries. So I thought it would be seen as a story about judgment, and it turned out to be seen as a story about sex because there were one and a half paragraphs about sex in 7,000 words about judgment.

And in some ways, there's always been a bright line in Clinton land that you can't cross. One thing that gets the Clintons themselves very, very upset is any suggestion that he could still be up to his old tricks. That's very unforgivable for them. Because the official story is he went through it, and he got over it, and he had counseling, and he's better. I just don't think people change so fundamentally in adulthood that that's necessarily probable. These things were all anyone I know in Washington or New York or Los Angeles who knows Bill Clinton have been talking about for years. But no one had been talking about them in print. It wasn't intended as some, I suppose it sounds naive for me to say this, but it wasn't really intended to be as provocative a piece as people took it to be. It was intended to be a serious piece that said look these are some real issues that nobody is talking about. A lot of the reporting was not even original. I was recounting the stuff that was on the public record and his involvement with this person in Kazakhstan and these other leaders. As Graydon once said, hanging around Ron Burkle and Steve Bing, who are bachelors and single and can behave however they wish, that's OK, but Bill Clinton is not a bachelor and single. He's married to the most prominent, potentially, certainly the most prominent female politician in the country and the potential president. So he doesn't get to behave in the same way everyone else might get to behave if they didn't have that public profile, and it was naive for him to think that such behavior would go unnoticed or unremarked on. It was by far the most professionally upsetting thing that ever happened to me. But it was very upsetting to have him go off that way although I'm increasingly persuaded based on some evidence that he didn't, he was trying to get this out of his hair. I'm sure he wasn't happy with the piece, but he doesn't believe all that stuff he said. He doesn't think I'm a scumbag.

Was anything factually incorrect?

No, they never pointed to anything factually incorrect. This 5,000-word thing they put out, which was half as long as the piece, never pointed to a single factual error. They started to attack Graydon Carter's potential conflicts of interest involving Hollywood and other things, but they never said this thing is wrong. And also some of it was, this is another thing where point of view comes into play, some of it was frankly and confessedly speculative. The part about whether his health had played a role, I made it clear, we can't prove this. This is out there. I had written a quite similar series of speculations in a piece I did about Vice President Cheney where a lot of people talked about how his experience with his heart illness and his bypasses and his multiple surgeries and multiple heart attacks might really have given him an acute, increased sense of his own mortality and affected his view and darkened his personality. There was not anything like a similar outcry about that.

This was the kind of piece that you find in Vanity Fair. How is point of view used in this magazine?

There are two kind of parts of the magazine. Front of the book has columns by people like Christopher Hitchens, Michael Wolff or James Wolcott. And those are really, overtly, highly personal essays because they are pure, often opinion. They are critical takes on things, in Christopher's case, come to bear his enormous British education. And they are frankly opinion pieces. Point of view throughout the magazine is often used in a very direct way. When Dominick Dunne is covering a trial or something, he makes clear his own views. He makes clear who he's rooting for or who he believes or who he doesn't trust. I think it's quite common in the celebrity profiles for the interviewer to describe being in the universe of the celebrity person, interacting with them, what it's like to negotiate terms of seeing them some times. I think point of view is throughout the magazine in all sorts of ways. No more than it's in *The New York Times Magazine* or *The New Yorker*. I think it permeates probably every aspect of the magazine.

Would you say it's very individualized based on writer or that it's more uniform?

No, I think it's very individualized based on writers. One of the things Cullen likes to say is 3/4 or 4/5 of the content that's in *Vanity Fair* could be in *The Atlantic* or *The New Yorker* or any other magazine, but then there's this very sort of glossy, sparkly, noticeable 1/5 that gets a lot of attention and frankly pays the bills. The trick for *Vanity Fair* is to get respect for the serious articles without losing the enormous pop culture engine that fuels the train and keeps it all going. Graydon has his own political views, which he talks about in his editor's letter. But at *The New York Times*, there was much more this kind of, and this is going to come out wrong, and they won't like me for saying these things, there was much a sense that there were orders from Moscow about how we were supposed to do something or what the paper's take was on a subject than there ever was at *Vanity Fair*. Cullen has pushed me to say what I really think or to add it all up and say what does this really mean, where is this logic component, what are you trying to say here? But no one's ever told me, you're going to write this piece and take this point of view. Whereas frankly at *The New York Times*, there was much more of a tendency to say well, obviously this is what the president means, you should interpret it this way because this is where he's going. Oddly enough, there was much more this uniform, institutional point of view at *The New York Times* than at *Vanity Fair*. *Vanity Fair* is highly individualistic depending on who the writer is.

You touched on a few of the advantages earlier. I wanted to go back to that and ask you more directly. What are the advantages to taking a point of view?

Well I think if it's done intelligently and sensitively with real factual undergirding, it gets at a bigger truth. It gets at something more essential. It gets at something deeper. And it allows you to ideally, not in some dime-store psychology way, but it allows you to take the tools of, frankly the tools of biographers, the tools of authors of books to go back in time. One of the luxuries of magazine writing is it often allows you to go back in time, far back in someone's past to a point that might not seem newsworthy or relevant to the purpose of a daily newspaper, but it might be very, very relevant to how they got to be where they are. So I wrote a piece about Dick Cheney, for example, that really focused on trying to answer the question, "How did this guy who everyone thought in the Ford Administration was so nice and such a wonderful chief of

staff become this caricature of Darth Vader. What happened in between?" And part of the answer was he was always more like Darth Vader than people thought at the time because he was working for a very different kind of president. The other answer is 9/11 and looking at the abyss of chemical biological warfare and thinking that his longtime view which was pretty dark about how the world works had been proven correct. And that we were all going to die. And it was his job to save us from that. So I called up an old reporter Jim Naughton, who covered the Ford White House for *The New York Times*. He used to be kind of a practical joker, and Cheney had helped the other president play practical jokes on Naughton at the end of the election. I don't know if you read that piece, but I wasn't the first person to tell it, but it's now become kind of a famous story where Naughton had done all kinds of pranks during the campaign, including getting the secret service to put a live sheep in a colleague's room, so they paid Naughton back by having Cheney call him and say the president is going to give him the first interview after his defeat. Said you have to go to Camp David. They basically punkd him. Cheney was heading up the call. Not only can I not imagine Dick Cheney doing something like that, I can't imagine any vice president doing that. I can't imagine Biden doing anything like that. In some ways it was a throwback to how much more trust existed between politicians at that time. I think that's an advantage. I think it's also an advantage, for example, if I had an interview with Bill Clinton for this piece, which I tried to get, and if I had asked him about some of these questions and he had reacted to me the way he reacted to some of these other people, then that all becomes part of the ... His reaction, his anger, becomes part of the story. Not because you're trying to provoke him. Point of view in magazine writing isn't always the author's point of view. The author can also reflect the point of view of the subject in a greater depth and detail, partly through an interaction with a subject, the back and forth. It just becomes more, I keep coming back on this word, but it's just sort of more honest. It's not this omniscient voice of the 10 commandments, which is what the news pages of *The New York Times* have traditionally been written in. And I think it's getting harder and harder for newspapers to do that, and for that to be enough for newspaper audiences.

So it sounds like it's really being able to use these fiction storytelling techniques like dialogue and place?

I'd be careful about fiction. It is true. I would say more traditionally narrative storytelling techniques of all kinds, which are appropriate in fiction and nonfiction. The new journalism was basically an effort to apply the techniques of fiction. What I stop short of is the kind of, putting myself inside his head and saying Cheney thought that blah blah blah. That to me can be effective if you've interviewed somebody at great, great length. One of my problems with Bob Woodward's books is that he imputes thoughts and feelings to people with the kind of methodology he has of which they're never really there. That to me gets tricky because how do you know that's how they felt? But if you do the techniques of extensive dialogue and back and forth and conversation and reproduction of, in the sound business they call actualities. That's true. There's much more room for that. There's just more room for one thing. There's more room for scenes, and there's more room for talking, and there's more room for voice, the person's voice and your voice.

What are the disadvantages? Are there disadvantages?

It's harder. And if it's not done well... When it's done poorly, it's really bad. Whereas a newspaper article done poorly, it's just a newspaper article. But if bad magazine writing in which there is too much voice kind of cringe inducing voice, too much kind of self-referential, like a famous example of this, my college classmate, Michael Lewis once wrote, the author of *Moneyball* and *Liar's Poker*, he once wrote a famous piece for *The New Republic* about his then girlfriend. I don't think she was his wife. She might have been his wife before he was married to Tabitha Soren. He had dated or was married to this woman who was a model, an underwear model, and he wrote a long thing basically about her behind and how wonderful her behind was. It was creepy. Save that for your own diary. Similar, there was a piece that Alex Kazinsky wrote in *The New York Times Magazine* last year about her plastic surgery or something. It was also one of those things that was too much information. I didn't want to know all this stuff about how you felt about all this. Sometimes I think if you're not careful, it can turn into this self-parody, which I'm not that interested in what you think about this. There are other reporters who can clearly see, they have some big light to see. They become a parent for the first time. They go through rehab, and suddenly everything they write is all about no one's ever been a parent in the world except them, no one's ever been through recovery except them. Sometimes when people write those kinds of stories, they should write them and set them aside for six months or 18 months and then come back to them and say, "Would I still do it the same way?" It's almost like the pink cloud system when you're in the first flush of it, you have to be careful not to make your reader feel that you're not taking him or her along on the trip. Like it's so special to you that the person can't identify with it or can't follow, then you've lost them on the way.

Kind of being wary of being too self-indulgent.

Exactly. Exactly. And just because you can do it, you should always ask yourself is it the right thing to do? Because you can put a first-person voice in pretty freely, is first-person voice always the most effective way to do it, or are there times where it's appropriate to keep yourself out of it? Precisely to let the subject shine through. Generally speaking, even in newspaper writing, I covered politics in general, I always found that one of the most useful things was to let the politician talk and put down what he said, not in a stenographic way, in a revelatory way. This is what he said. Now the modern sort of blogosphere, especially the leftie blogosphere, insists that you then underline that by saying, the person makes an obviously idiotic remark, and you're then supposed to say "he said, idiotically..." A recent example of that I thought was revealing was just as the Bush administration was ending after we had our oral history, Mike Abramowitz got an interview with Steve Hadley and Josh Bolten, in which they both went on at great length about how talented Bush was, and they insisted at the same time that he had not re-calibrated after the '06 elections. But then in the next breath, they said they changed a lot. They tried to get back in the game. That piece drew enormous amounts of criticism on the left because he said that Mike gave these guys a pass. I thought what Mike did was go interview them, put down what they said, made it very clear abundantly how that was the world how they understood it. But didn't sort of

underline it and say, and aren't they assholes for saying that? I mean I don't think any intelligent person could read it and not come away with, "What planet are these people on?" And Mike didn't say that. So to me, that's an example of a case where point of view was not necessary to tell the story in an effective way, but back to where you started.

A great number of people, in what I assume is your generation, not only don't understand what objectivity was supposed to be about, if you explain it to them, they don't believe it. They don't think it's achievable, and they don't think it's a valid paradigm. They don't think it's an acceptable storytelling paradigm. And part of that happened because, especially in the first six years of the Bush administration, when the left felt that congress wasn't dong its job of loyal opposition or the democratic party in general, I used to get all kinds of e-mails from readers, basically assumed and insisted *The New York Times* should be the loyal opposition. And *The New York Times* should say every day, in another lying lie, President Busy lied today. To me, that's never going to be acceptable. But I think there are a lot of people now in the country, who are not only not invested in the old style of objectivity, who actively reject it and think it's not useful. And Mike Kinsley has long said that he think it's possible that American journalism will move steadily toward a more European-style journalism in which there's a partisan tinge to things. We may be seeing that in sort of the next wave. Maybe *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* 20 years from now will be much smaller, sort of more discerning slices of life rather than this big general-interest thing that tries to appeal to a mass audience. And one of the things that we see, in general, in national life and cultural life and every other aspect is that there are very, very few mass-audience phenomena. The days where the networks were the dominant thing, if there was a really big program, 60 or 70 percent of the public might be watching one thing on one night. I don't think you could point to anything that's as big in our national, cultural life as *I Love Lucy* or the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

It's almost going back to even the way that media started with partisan leanings.

Absolutely. And the truth is the thing that's hard for people like me and my old bosses at *The New York Times* to remember is that in the great sweep of the history of journalism, that particular model that we all thought of as the norm is really an aberration. It's had a pretty short life. Even the business model that relied on a combination of paid circulation and advertising to finance the distribution of a mass newspaper, that itself has not always been the case. They were overtly partisan, and they had printing businesses. That was how they supported themselves. I think it's always risky for any particular generation, or couple of generations, to think that their way is the only way it's ever been done when in fact, it's not.

Is objectivity always in conflict with point of view?

No! No! That's where I come back to the point of everybody's entitled to his own opinions but not to his own facts. The facts are what went on with this guy in Kazakhstan are indisputable. The facts are the facts. You can describe the facts in a way that makes them look worse, I guess. You can describe the facts in a way that seem that his life's benign and obviously there was no corrupt intent or whatever. But if you hold true to the facts, then the facts are subject to tradition. I don't think it's in conflict at all. I think in

fact, the most effective point of view writing occurs when the facts are incontrovertibly established. When you've really nailed the factual circumstances, it gives you greater license to noodle on what it all means. But if you get the facts wrong, that's a problem. That's always a problem.

It's something that Richard Stengel of Time talks about. How after you've done all your reporting and you have all the facts, then you have that license to take a point of view.

One of the problems I have, I want to be careful about this because it's not that I have a problem with bloggers per se or the stereotype of people sitting around in their pajamas. Early in the Kennedy administration, Sam Rayburn, speaker of the house, said that he'd feel a lot better about some of these people if they ever ran for sheriff. I feel sometimes that commentators or journalists of opinion, who've never had to cover a fire or cover an election or see a politician in a grocery store whom they've insulted in print the day before, it's not fun. And it's also, all that teaches you something. So I think I'm not nearly so interested in the pure opinions of even a very smart person as I am of the informed opinions of a person who's really applied him or herself to accept facts. And also look, the reason point of view journalism is useful is because all of the most interesting parts of life are not the black-and-white parts. They're the gray parts. And point of view journalism is much more suited to the gray than the black and white. Now, I guess that's somewhat contradictory because you might think that if it's point of view, then you're taking a stand, and you're ignoring all of the other arguments. I don't think that means you're ignoring all of the other arguments. I think it just may say that at the end of the day, having surveyed the whole debate, saying this is really.

Well you can take it into account.

You can take it into account and you can mention them. I don't think there's usually just one answer. I think that what Rick says is true. I'd much rather read what Adam Berney really thinks about the campaign at the end of the day than somebody who's just watching it from East Jurip Ohio, reacting to what he or she sees on cable television. I think the other thing that is, what's the word I'm looking for, I think it's a good convention of newspaper journalism that it is not kosher to whine and complain about how hard your life as a journalist is. Generally, it's not considered appropriate to explain how hard you had to work to physically file the story or how tired you were or how hungover you were or whatever. You're really not supposed to. No one cares if the campaign is refusing to talk to the press or giving you handouts or trying to control the message or hustling you back on the bus. It might be interesting to report that as one sort of sign about how they're managing things. But basically no one cares about your problems. They care about what's happened. But I think the corollary of that that's not so happy is that sometimes in newspaper journalism, there's this pretense that nobody has any feelings or that it isn't really awful to be caught up in something. It isn't really agonizing to be in the middle of a big firestorm. And I think when you've been in the middle of the firestorm, as I was in a minor way with this, as a journalist, it gives you an appreciation for what it's like to be a public figure who's in the middle of a firestorm. And frankly, being married to Dee Dee has given me a very useful sense of what public figures go through when they're written about. I wish personally that more journalists

would keep in mind that everybody has a mother, and everybody is somebody's sister or father, and the worst most horrible person that you can think of has some human qualities or people who care about them. What I said about running into people at the grocery store, there is this sort of macho notion of let the chips fall where they lay, and that's all well and good, but I don't think journalists should by and large lose sight of the fact that they're writing about real people who have all the feelings that I have. It's no sin or sign of weakness to acknowledge that, to acknowledge the human toll that's taken.

That goes a bit into my next question, which is what do you try not to do with your point of view?

Yeah. I think you've got to be careful. I've never found it appealing, this kind of we'll knock 'em down and grind them into the pavement. It's just too much. So you just have to be aware of that. I think you lose credibility. People are basically fair. They reject things that seem instinctively unfair. If somebody's screwing up, say it but don't sort of keep saying they really screwed up. Less is more. And the lighter touch is better than the heavy touch. Add it up elegantly as opposed to hammer them over the head with it. One of the, what's the word I'm looking for, rules of the road of newspaper objective journalism that must apply equally to point of view journalism is show don't tell. Show through scenes and sounds and sights and words what someone's like, rather than just telling it. Let the reader in on what you see so the reader can believe and understand and appreciate your exposition of it because he or she is seeing it him or herself firsthand. Don't just say Ken Starr was an asshole. Explain the things that Ken Starr did that were indices of assholery and let people see and add that up.

Now do you think that point of view can affect credibility in both ways then?

Definitely, and this is something I wrestle with all the time. People think that an article in *Vanity Fair*, which is culturally liberal, and Graydon is overtly politically liberal, and *Vanity Fair* is not aimed at Evangelical Christians or something. But if an Evangelical Christian reads it and can easily say this is more on the predictable path on the left wing noise machine, then somehow you've probably in a small way at least missed a chance to make someone say gosh, I never thought of it this way. For example, when we did the Bush oral history, it wasn't a pretty picture because the last eight years weren't a pretty picture. We went out of our way, and a lot of people we tried to talk to just wouldn't talk to us because some people didn't want to talk to *Vanity Fair*. Some people didn't want to be a part of a big thing. Some people followed their mother's rule of if you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all. But we went out of our way to find people who would also say positive things either about the president's personal qualities as a human being or his loyalty or the work he did with AIDS in Africa or education or whatever. I think your credibility is always enhanced if you seem to give a more nuanced picture as opposed to a slanted, one-sided ... If you give a rounded portrait I think is always better than if you give a one-sided one.

How do you distinguish your point of view in your political writing than those on blogs?

The principal difference you hope you can bring there is often the blogs don't have access to the subject. They haven't been able to travel around with or interview the

person. It's not absolutely necessary because there are famous profiles written by people who had basically no access to their source. The most famous one of all is Gay Talese's "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," which he could be on the fringes of him but never really interviewed him. The principal difference with blogs is length and time, time of thinking about it and space to explain it at greater length. But you know, on any different topic, like could I say anything more intelligent than Josh Marshall could on Talking Points Memo? Probably not because he's a very intelligent guy. They do original writing. They won the George Polk award for their coverage of the U.S. Attorney firing. That's a whole new universe of competition that just didn't exist even five years ago, so that's something to be aware of. We're never going to be able to compete with them because we don't have access to that immediate audience they do. What we have to hope we can do is three or four months after something chaotic has happened, we can come back and say well this is how it all unfolded. That's a contribution we can make that lacks immediacy but has greater understanding.

What am I missing?

Well I think you've touched on it, but basically that it's. ... People might think that it's fun, you can just say whatever you think. And sometimes it is fun. I had written a sentence that if I had written it in *The New York Times*, if I had written it in the Week in Review section, it would have seemed to have a pretty strong point of view. But it was written in a way that was every so slightly couched with some intermediary thing. I don't know whether it was a locution like it could be said that. It was slightly distancing. And Cullen just took it out and said we don't need that device here. You can just say that. You don't need to say somebody might say that. You are saying that. It's like your third grade teacher told you, with freedom comes responsibility. It's hard. It is hard to do it well and it is... if you want the reader to trust you, and you are taking a point of view and you know the reader might share your point of view, the real trick is to make even the reader who doesn't share your point of view, respect your point of view and say wow, I never thought about it that way before. I think one of the biggest goals of magazine writing, these long-form pieces, is for people to say oh, I never thought about it that way or I knew all those things but I never added it up that way. That's not to say that you do the opposite. You hope to find new things. I guess I knew this would get a lot of attention, when I wrote this piece about Dick Cheney, by far the thing that got the most attention was that one of his friends told me that he rides around in a limousine with a chemical biological suit in the back seat. And he joked to his friend, there's only one, there's not enough for you if there's a disaster. And that got enormous pickup on the blogosphere, in newspapers around the country, and it was picked up in several books. It's not to sneeze at little nuggets of fact that people haven't known before, but the real job is to add it up in a way that seems fresh. In the Bush Oral History, for example, all the factual topics covered are pretty well known. We didn't make news and discover something that happened that nobody knew. But it got a lot of attention because even people who'd been there, their level of disappointment and their reflection on it from a distance, put it all in a new light. This is where Cullen is really smart. He proposed this. I thought A, who would talk? And B, is there really anything new to say at this late day, and isn't it a tired sort of backward looking topic? But it turned out to be exactly the right time to take one last

look back because on some level, people couldn't really believe it happened. The thing about that particular device was it stood in digestible bites so people could read a few things and put it on the nightstand. Sometimes I look at *Vanity Fair* and *New Yorker*, and you see these long articles, and I think oh my God, how am I going to do this?

Well it sounds like you're also saying there's really this element of responsibility, too.

Yeah. When you're a newspaper reporter, you really work without a net. There's copyediting to reform the style, but there's no fact checking. The public doesn't really understand that in newspapers, there's no fact checking.

I don't even know if the public understands that in magazines, there is fact checking.

I'm sure they probably don't. But I mean one of the real wake-up calls for me was that when you're a newspaper reporter and you turn in a story, that's fundamentally the end of the process because it's a question of maybe minutes. When you turn in a magazine piece, that's really only the very beginning of the process that's quite elaborate on the back hand whether that's questions of art, layout issues that you don't get involved in or the fact checking. They want to see all your notes. They want to see all the transcripts of your interviews. They want to know all the people you talked to. *Vanity Fair* does not read the quotes back to people. If there's any doubt about the sense of it, they call the person. And in the case of technical information like the doctor in here, talking about the medical stuff, they elaborately read back to him the point of it. When you get material from a book, they want the Xeroxed page from the book. When you have an anonymous source, they want to know who every one of them is, and they did know who every one of those was. They had enough information that they could have produced an annotated version of that story. One of the kind of mind games I play with myself is that if I had ever published a version of that story in which all of the anonymous people were named, no one would eat lunch in this town again because these were not junior-level people. People reacted to that so violently because it was true, not because it wasn't true. But I'm willing to acknowledge that I was really as I said naive. And you know I think there's legitimate, Jack Shafer and others, there's a legitimate debate about journalistic practice. It's also very clear that you could never write a story like that with only named sources. On the one hand you would say, well why are you using anonymous sources for something that doesn't involve national security? It's not intended to save lives. It's not intended to expose wrongdoing. It's just kind of sort of gratuitous. It's just delving into a person's life, psyche or whatever. I guess the answer is because he was an important person, will continue to be an important person, public figure, and in some weird way, if that's the only way to get at the truth, maybe that's worth it. I think people who have the luxury and the license to write with a point of view should take it seriously and not abuse it. And people who do abuse it get punished in the end. Over time, some people who are like too much hot dogs, it doesn't bode well. They get in trouble.

Well people stop talking to you.

Yeah. People think that you're going to always loose it up to them. I'm not going to name names, but there are writers I always have a sense that this is a little too good to be true.

Knowing the backlash, would you have done anything differently?

I've thought about that so many times because one of the backlash was I didn't write enough about the good things he did. You could put in there 20,000 words about all the good things he did, but if you put this one little paragraph in, it still would have gotten all the attention. But I think it might have helped to write a little bit more about the good things he did. And I think it would have helped ... I guess I might have left out the name of Gina Gershon because it became a lightning rod that it wasn't intended to be.

This is kind of backward, I usually do this at the beginning, but will you please tell me a bit about your background in journalism?

Sure. I was born in Macomb, Illinois, which is a town about 250 miles southwest of Chicago, where my grandfather had in his youth had actually been the managing editor of two local newspapers before going in the savings and loans business. I went to Princeton for college, where I worked at an organization called the University Press Club, which is a group of stringers that works for papers in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia. Its alumni include both Rukeyser brothers, Mike McCurry, and a bunch of people at the *New York Times* like James Barron and my classmate Allison Cowan, Mark Sherman, who covers the Supreme Court for the AP, and Marc Fisher who writes a column for the *Washington Post*, and Alex Wolff who works for *Sports Illustrated*. As a student journalist, I was able to make real money, writing for the *Asbury Park Press* and *The Star Ledger*, and my junior year I became the stringer for *The New York Times*, covering campus events for the *Times*. After graduation, I went to work as a copyboy at the *Times*. Then I became a clerk, and my jobs included composing the weather page and being the makeup clerk in the composing and tracking and progress of type into the paper, seeing what headlines are missing, calling the editors to write these headlines. After two years, two months and 29 days of that, I became a reporter trainee in the business section where for a year I wrote short profiles of executives who were getting new jobs or losing their old ones. And then a very traditional path, I was sent to the metro desk where I covered the police for two years, then I went to city hall for two years and covered local politics. Then when David Dinkens became mayor, I was made the city hall bureau chief in charge of the city hall coverage, and I did that for two years. Then I became the chief metropolitan global correspondent, which is writing about electro politics, and the title was really a way to avoid paying me overtime. Then I came to Washington for the first time at the end of 1993 to cover the regional delegation of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut in Washington, which was a wonderful job because it involved all sorts of topics and the only common thread had to be that they had something to do with the people who lived in or represented those three states. And then as now the delegation was a very interesting one. After a year of that I was assigned to cover the Clinton White House just after the 1994 midterm elections, and I covered the White House through the reelection of 1996 and into the winter of 1997. When I became the Los Angeles bureau chief, supervising our coverage of Southern California, Arizona, Nevada and Hawaii and running what that time and I think still is the largest bureau at the paper outside Washington, we had nine people altogether there. Then I came back to Washington in 2001 to cover a number of things, including diplomacy at the state

department, politics and policy and a whole range of issues. In the 2004 campaign, I had a principal role in covering that and writing a series about John Kerry. I left the paper in the end of 2005 to go to Vanity Fair in January 2006. Most of my career has been involved in covering politics in one way or another although it's something I kind of drifted into more than I sought out. I like it. It's interesting to me. But it's not the only thing I'm interested in. ... It's a lot of *New York Times*. The good news was I had six or seven or eight different jobs over 23 years so it never felt bored. I never felt like I was doing the same thing over and over again. And I was looking to leave, but when Graydon approached me out of the blue. I started thinking about it. I was turning 46; I had been there 23 years. It was the only place I'd ever worked. I wasn't blind to the trends in the print newspaper business, and I thought if I'm ever going to take a chance and do something new, now is probably a good time to do it.

Richard Stengel, Managing Editor of *Time* Magazine

March 11, 2009
30 minutes via phone

Can you tell me a bit about your background in journalism?

My background in journalism. Well, I have no training as a journalist. The thing that made me into a journalist was when I took John McPhee's class at Princeton, the Literature of Fact, and that made me think I could actually do this for a living. It was a very inspiring course. In fact, he, that is John, taught me a lot about point of view because in some ways that is the genesis of much that he does. I was then a grad student at Oxford, doing a thesis that involved American history. And he got me an interview at *Time* when I finished at Oxford. I started at *Time* when I was in my early 20s. Got my real education here in journalism in a practical way.

What have your positions been at Time working up to Managing Editor?

I was a staff writer. I guess, even before you're a staff writer, you're sort of a try-out staff writer. Then I became a staff writer. Then a senior writer and then a senior editor. And then an assistant managing editor, which is really a bogus title and doesn't mean anything. Then I left and came back a couple of times. I was an assistant managing editor and left in 2004. And then came back as managing editor in the middle of 2006.

In your own words, how would you describe this concept of point of view?

Well, I'll take it back a little bit, which is that as a journalist and getting to know other journalists, you find out that if you're socializing with people who are journalists that they have often very strong points of view and opinions on everything and, in particular, on the things that they cover. When I was a young journalist, and I would read people's pieces whether it was *Time* or *The New York Times* or *The New Yorker* or whatever, I would generally see this kind of on the one hand, on the other hand structure, which I think was the general kind of dialectic of objectivity. The way you were objective was you sort of summarized both points of view if there are two or both sides of the

argument if there are two, and you let the reader decide. What I realized was that the journalists often have very strong opinions about which point or view or which idea or which opinion or which theory was correct or better, and that this pursuit of objectivity was in some ways, not a sham exactly, but a very difficult thing because people tended to sometimes marshal the evidence in favor of their point of view under the guise that it was evenhanded or objective. And then I think sociology and psychology has taught us over the decades that it's very hard to look at something objectively if you have a strong subjective point of view about it. Just the way you assemble your facts and you assemble your viewpoint is dictated in part by what you already think or feel. Over the years, I began in reading those kinds of journalism, newspaper stories or wire service stories or *Time* magazine stories, I began to think what's really the point of this? It's not really objective. In some ways I felt manipulated as a reader. And wouldn't it ultimately be better for the person writing this story to do his or her best in a sense to kind of assemble the facts, to then marshal different views and support certain facts and basically say look, I've covered this story, I've met these people, I've learned about this subject, and I'm going to tell you all about it, and after I finish telling you about it, I'm also going to give you my point of view because based on my experience and my study and my knowledge, this is what I think is right, or this is what I think is the best course of action. They should build the building or tear it down. They should not submit the budget or they should. And that to me, there was something more honest and direct and in some ways even objective about that than this kind of false sense of objectivity that was dictated by the on the one hand, on the other structure of journalistic stories.

How long has Time essentially been taking this stance of we're going to use this?

The truth is of course that the notion of journalistic objectivity in some ways is a relatively modern notion. When *Time* was started under Luce and Hadden, the stories all had a very strong point of view. In fact, they weren't even trying to be objective and then give a point of view. They were tangentious and smart allicky, you know for not everything, but for lots and lots of stories. And Luce, when he eventually took over, had a very strong point of view about things, and he wanted the magazine to reflect that. There was a very long time, I hesitate to put dates on this, but there was a very long time where *Time* had a very strong point of view. And often that was a Republican point of view, and people felt like well, I understand where they're coming from. In that sense it was not unlike the tradition of English newspapers where there's a labor newspaper and a conservative newspaper and an independent newspaper, and you bought the paper that reflected your own point of view. I always laugh, what was the H.L. Minkin line, that the objective point of view is the one that agrees with me. I think that's how a lot of people look at things. In fact, I won't go off on a tangent about that, but a lot of the research today shows that people do because of the Web, they can just read points of view that agree with theirs. I think that was the Kass Epstein theory. So *Time* for a long time had a very strong point of view. I think only frankly probably, in the '50s, '60s, or the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, the more mainstream tradition of trying to be more purely objective and not to push the scale in one direction or the other or to have a point of view that you give to the reader, I think that came in only sort of post-Luce, I think. I think this point of view is something that people gradually have been moving toward. I don't think any editor, I

don't think Bill Keller, the (executive) editor of *The New York Times*, has articulated the point of view theory like I have. I don't think he talks about it. But if you look at *The New York Time*s today, virtually every news story on the *Times* front page or anywhere in the newspaper, 10 years ago would have been labeled an analysis story. And the analysis stories today are stories with a very strong point of view. The line has moved in a pretty radical way, and I think it's kind of a coin of the realm now even if people don't realize it.

So you think that people are moving toward this not just in magazines?

Oh, yeah. I think what's considered objective today would have been considered a point of view 20 years ago.

This notion of objectivity, is it always in conflict with objectivity? Are there aspects of objectivity in this?

Well, yes. I believe that there is. It's not always easy to articulate. To me, what I want is something that combines the old-fashioned here's a summary of the different points of view with a modern OK, I've explained these to you, I've summarized them to you, now I'm going to evaluate their merit or their weight, and then I'm going to come to a conclusion. As a reader, what I want, someone's walking me through this. She's explaining all three sides of the argument, and then she's actually saying why she thinks A is better than B, which is better than C. At some point as a reader, I might be able to say, you know what, I actually disagree with that. She's done such a good job of explaining it that I actually think C is better than A, and B is better than A, and I disagree with her conclusion. To me, being transparent is part of what, transparent about how you get to your point of view, is part of what modern point of view journalism is about. You want to let the reader behind the curtain and see the mechanics of the thing and how you got there. Otherwise, it's like doing a mathematical equation and just putting the conclusion without showing how you got there. I want the reader to see how the writer gets there.

Apart from transparency, what are the other advantages to taking point of view?

I think in many ways it's more honest. By the way, I don't think people should manufacture a point of view if they don't have one. But I think if you have one based on again your experience and your reporting and your knowledge that it's more honest to say what it is. And I don't think that necessarily prejudices the take you might have on something else or even a preliminary view of the topic you're writing about. I think, yes, it feels more honest. It feels more modern. I think people's understanding of issues is deeper and broader than it ever was before. This is a big part of this. Once upon a time, people didn't have access to all the data and information that journalists have. The first presidential campaign I ever covered was 1988. I carried two suitcases. One suitcase had my clothes in it. The other suitcase had the candidates' position papers, speeches and all that. I remember listening to Michael Dukakis speak and looking at the text of the speech, and people in the crowd would go, "Where did you get that? How can I get something like that?" That was all exclusive information. Now that stuff is available to every single reader and voter on that person's Web site and a million other Web sites. So journalists

were once the kind of mandarins of exclusive information, and they're not anymore. I want what's exclusive to be what I tell the reader. I don't want to tell the reader the stuff that he or she can find out for himself or herself. So part of it is that there is so much more information out there, the reader is more informed. The reader can actually make a better judgment about what you're writing than readers could in the pre-Internet age. To me that's why transparency is important. That's why it feels more honest and it feels more sophisticated and it feels more modern.

That sounds like what you've said about the necessity to become a mini-expert on something before you can go and take that point of view.

Right. Look. The thing about journalism is if you're not a real expert at something, part of what our job is to become an immediate expert. And you know a little bit more than the person reading the newspaper so you feel like an expert. But you actually know much, much less than someone who truly is an expert. But there are journalists who really are experts. Our religion writer has been covering and writing about religion for 25 years. Our science writer's the same thing. To me, what I want as a reader and an editor, is the benefit of their knowledge and wisdom and point of view. I may disagree with it, but I don't want this person to pretend that she doesn't think that. She has to write a story about whether baby injections cause autism or not. Once upon a time, she would have written that story, and she would have summarized both sides, and that would have ended. And I know that our science writer thought it's just not good science. It doesn't make sense that these immunization shots cause autism. And there's all kind of science to back it up, and I want to tell the reader that. That, I think, is important. I mean that is doing a real service as opposed to the other way where you're not taking a point of view about it.

Are there disadvantages as well?

Sure there are disadvantages. One of the disadvantages is potentially commercial where people feel like I don't want to read your publication because it's prejudiced, or it's subjective, or it has a point of view. I want someone to be objective. I hear that all the time. And you can't say to them, "Well, that's not really possible." Or, "What you think is objective is not." So there's some commercial hazard there. Other downsides? The other thing is sometimes you feel like you have to run multiple stories on the same subject if you have a strong point of view on one. Actually that's not really true. I don't do that. Part of it is that no publication anymore is either so comprehensive or so exclusive that anyone uses it as their exclusive source of information. So I don't ever think that if someone reads a story in *Time* about the president's stimulus package, that they're not reading or getting lots of other information about it. Or if I have a piece about why the stimulus is bad that I have to mate it or pair it with a piece about why the stimulus is good. The reader can find something about why someone thinks the stimulus is good. I was about to say that is a downside, but I don't think it is. I'm trying to think of other downsides. Well you can think of them.

How does point of view affect credibility with readers?

My point of view on it is that it enhances credibility with readers. What I felt as a reader myself that undermined the credibility of a publication was that the writer wasn't giving his or her point of view when he or she had one. And to me transparency affects credibility, and certainly authority reflects credibility. And I want people who have authority on a subject because they know it and they have experience and etc., that they can use that authority by telling the reader what he or she thinks. In my view, it enhances credibility. Like I've said before, there are certainly plenty of readers who think the opposite.

I spoke with David Von Drehle about voice. Is Time becoming a group of individualized voices every issue?

I hope so. I think that's the sort of modern thing. I want the *Time* writers to all ... for readers to feel like they have different voices as well as points of view, and that it shouldn't be homogenized. David is a great example of it. He can't write a sentence without voice in it, and that isn't even necessarily about point of view. That's about style. To me, it's like conducting an orchestra. You don't want the oboe to sound the same as the violin to sound the same as the drummer, but you want them all to work in harmony. The magazine as a whole is the orchestra, and it's made up of all those different voices and different instruments, and you want them to be distinct. And I think that's what, particularly in a magazine, which is in some ways different than a newspaper, you want to be attached to different writers and different voices. That's what makes you come back, and that what makes you value the publication.

Is that happening across the board in the magazine world?

Sure, I think so. Certainly that was true and has been true almost always with feature magazines like *Esquire* or *GQ* or *Atlantic Monthly*. I actually think the *New Yorker* in a weird way has a more homogenized voice than other magazines even though everybody thinks that they are the magazine of different voices. That's my singular point of view about that. I certainly think that voice has been something that people have cared about for a long time now in the magazine world.

Is all of this addressed in the mission state of Time and going toward a target audience?

I certainly talked about it a lot when I first became managing editor, and I still talk about it. I think people here have somewhat internalized it. I continue to talk about it because I generally think you have to tell people stuff over and over again.

What's your vision for Time and how things can continue to transform?

One part of that vision, you mentioned voice and point of view, the thing about voice is something that exists in all different mediums. In the sense that you want a journalist with a voice to be using that voice in every different way, in print, online, in video, on twitter, all the different arrows that a journalist should have in her quiver these days. And the point is that voice comes through in every different medium. Your voice is singular to you whether it's in 140 characters in Twitter or write a 10,000-word piece. David Von Drehle on Twitter would still be David Von Drehle. David Von Drehle on video would still be David Von Drehle. Part of I think what the future is for any

publication is to make sure the voices that make it up are on every different platform. Whatever the bus phrase is. Voice is platform agnostic, but you want to have it everywhere. And you want to deliver it every way possible and not only obviously just in print.

How do point of view and voice influence large-scale decisions and story selection?

It often helps dictate who we assign a particular story. I'm happiest when a writer is obsessed with the subject and comes with a pitch about a very interesting take on something, and I say just say great, go ahead. But sometimes we feel OK, like there's a story we have to do, who do you feel like could do it? You want somebody who you think, based on what you know already, is going to have an interesting take on it. For example, David Von Drehle wrote our opening piece in the magazine about the moment right now where the Obama administration is trying to decide OK, are we doing too many things at one time and ought to kind of consolidate around fixing the economy and the banking industry or we still take this attitude that crisis is an opportunity and we want to try to kind of do everything at once? I knew David had been thinking about this. David is sort of contrarian on this subject. You know, I'll just say this, he's not a knee-jerk liberal, and I thought that he's going to have an interesting take on this. I know he's going to write it beautifully. It's going to be thought through. It's not going to reflect a liberal consensus viewpoint. But I didn't say here's the viewpoint you should take. I knew he would bring something to it.

Will you also continue to make some of your bolder decisions such as the green border?

No. I'm going to become very timid. That's my plan. You use the green border thing, for example, because there are so many voices out there, because there's a surplus of information in every different form. It's much harder for any publication and mainstream publications, too, to break through, to get attention. Part of what some of that boldness is about is actually grabbing people by the lapel and saying pay attention. Putting the green border on the magazine, wow. Is it gimmicky? Yeah. Is it also a gimmick with some service to a larger idea? Yes. And it's often calculated to get people to pay attention. I think that's in some ways, for all of media, that's one of the primal and primary concerns right now is to get people to pay attention to what you do. Either pay for it or get advertisers to pay for it. You want to be able to kind of inject yourself into people's lives.

What do you try not to do with your point of view?

I'm trying not to be an opinion publication. Opinion is dressed up in point of view. Opinion is somebody saying George Bush is a jerk and not marshaling any evidence one way or another or having a very sophisticated view. One of the things that I find that's so troubling with the media landscape and watching cable television is that there's so much opinion. I define opinion as generally a point of view without any substance to it or backing or reporting or anything like that. And I think that's a danger zone.

What am I missing?

Good last question. The one thing, and I don't have this view particularly, a contra indication in a way is the "success" of publications like *The Week*, which actually do not have a point of view. They're kind of an aggregator of other points of view. Not to say that diminishes that person's point of view, but I do think there is also a hunger among people for someone to aggregate all this different information and aggregate all the different points of view. And that's a different kind of publication or organism in a way than a magazine or a newspaper. Even though magazines and newspapers are kind of aggregating more. That also is a kind of contra trend or at least a tangent.

Scott Stossel, Deputy Editor of *The Atlantic*

February 24, 2009
11 a.m. at *The Atlantic* office in Washington, D.C.
1 hour

Can you tell me about your journalism background?

Actually, a lot of my professional life has been here at *The Atlantic*. I've done kind of two tours of duty. I graduated from college. I went to Harvard and graduated in 1991. I did a little bit of newspaper stuff when I was in college, but I wasn't one of the hardcore newspaper people. The people at the *Crimson* were really hardcore. I did the weekly paper for a while. I wrote sports. And some other publications. But it wasn't like a big part of what I did. I majored in English. And then when I graduated, I actually spent a year trying to freelance, do freelance journalism. I did a little bit of stuff, but mainly I was working at a bookstore where I actually learned a lot about publishing. It was kind of like a second education. Having been an English major, I sort of learned classical canon and my year in the bookstore, I kind of learned contemporary fiction and the book business. I then started as an intern at *The Atlantic*. A friend of mine was working for the poetry editor, and she kind of hooked me up with the internship there and ended up staying for about four years. One job led to another, and I became a staff editor and helped start the Web site and did all that stuff. Then left for six years and went and worked at magazine called *The American Prospect*, which is a liberal public policy journal, and had a bunch of jobs there. Most of the time I was the executive editor. Wrote a book. Then came back. I've been back here since 2002. So I've been back here for six years. I came back as a senior editor. I then became managing editor in about 2005. My title's changed to deputy editor, but basically I'm sort of managing the day to day, overseeing the editorial department, composing the issue. And I've done freelance writing all for the last 10 years.

Who do you freelance for?

Well, lately I haven't done much because I haven't had time. I do books. I write book reviews for *The New York Times*. I used to write for local publications in Boston, did a piece for *The New Yorker*, did stuff for *The Atlantic* when I was at *The American Prospect*. I tend to write about the intersection of literature and politics, culture and politics, that sort of thing.

Now your job here as managing editor, what does that entail?

It totally depends on the day. It's everything from editing a lot of pieces, actually working with writers to improve their ... think about ideas, help them figure out how to shape a story, how to find a story. Then once the piece comes in, working with them and the fact checking department and the copyediting department to work the thing to a fine state of polish. A lot of composing the issue, deciding what's the right mix of stories, working with James Bennett, the editor-in-chief, to figure out what's the right pacing, what's the right mix of tones and subject matter or how to keep it the most timely. Kind of just overseeing the editing of all pieces to make sure *The Atlantic* standard is applied to them. And then I do a lot of administrative stuff, connecting with the advertising department, so they know what's coming up, so they can sell ads against it or with publicists, coordinating special projects, planning special issues, all kinds of inane stuff.

What's with all the post-it notes?

I was away for six weeks on a book leave. Let me see if I can find a picture. I came back, the post-it notes are the least of it, they had actually filled my entire office with balloons. I forget they're there. I just left them up because they're bright and unusual. They had gotten the interns to fill up the balloons, so when I opened the door, it was totally full. I brought my kids in and they frolicked around.

So, in your own words how would you describe this concept of point of view?

I don't think a lot about it explicitly in terms of point of view. I think about it more as voice and perspective, which is largely the same thing. It's kind of the angle of approach of a story. I don't know if that's a succinct way of defining it. It's basically, what's the altitude you're approaching a story from? Is it way high up, sort of an abstract and analytical? Is it first person, where you're projecting yourself into the story? Is it sort of a mixture? Again, like what you were saying before, the newspaper mode is kind of just the facts laid out in a very formulaic way. What you can do in magazines is inject the personal, sometimes the very personal and make it much more of an essay. And there are different techniques to make things more vivid or to elicit sympathy or sense of resonance or recognition in the reader.

How is voice and point of view used at The Atlantic?

In any given issue, we want to have a variety of perspectives. I'm looking at back issues to see if I can find one that can ... Whenever we're thinking about a piece, we're always thinking about, "What's the story?" Actually, one thing that's unique to *The Atlantic*, is we're always interested in ideas. Obviously, newspapers are interested in ideas but also facts and news. We're interested in news. We're interested in getting all of our facts right, but in a way that's different from say *Esquire* or even *The New Yorker*, we're almost always wanting to convey some really interesting, original idea. So the question for us becomes what's .... There's lots of different ways to convey ideas. You know, everything from a poem, which in some ways is the most efficient means of delivering one because they're very short and through imagery and language can convey a lot in a very intense space to graphics, which can convey an idea. Well here's a visual

page showing crime in New Orleans. It can be narrative where you're just telling a story. There's very little telling. It's all showing a story unfolding. There's not a lot of analysis or exposition. There are other ones that are complete analysis. It's all argument, very little narrative. There are others that are more essayistic, which tend to be more personal and kind of missing anecdote and analysis and going in and out. So in any given issue, we're likely to have all of those types of things. Just for example, in this issue, this cover story is very much in the analytical mode. It's written by a social scientist. He's got little mini stories and anecdotes. He starts with an anecdote about his own dad. But he's basically conveying information about economics and demography and kind of the sociology of ... and geography and how the economic crash will affect different cities. So he's taking a lot of data. He's imposing a lot of intellectual analysis and bringing to bear on this question. It's not very narrative. It's not very essayistic, although there are elements of it. Now the "Last Ace," which is the next piece in the issue, is completely different in tone. It's almost got this cinematic … It feels like a movie. And again, he's conveying something about an idea. This is an important policy question about ... is Barack Obama ... it boils down to should he fund the F22, which is this fighter? And there's elements of analysis in here, but it's all, it's not just telling one story, it's all in this very kind of visual description, describing dog fights, describing ... It's got elements of profile. Then you turn the pages to the next story, and I think we come to an actual profile. This is a straight profile. By the way, I didn't mention that in the group. Profiles can also have elements of narrative. You're telling a story of someone going through life, fighting with some drama, predicament or decision that they have to make. But it's also a character study. You're trying to get inside their psychology. So it's artful description, trying to, as the writer, you're trying to glean what you can from appearances but also from the things that they say, from the things that they've written and then also bringing to bear your own personal experience to a greater or lesser degree. So for instance, in this case, Paul Eli is himself devout Catholic. He's writing about an Anglican bishop, but he's bringing to bear, a little bit, in a sort of soft, light-handed way, his own religious experience and perspective. In contrast, in this issue the profile was of Michelle Obama. Again, this is a study in contrast here. In this case, Ta-Nehisi Coates, who's the writer, brings a lot more of his personal experience to bear because he talks about, he's an African-American, has spent a lot of time among whites and looking at different groups, how West Baltimore African-Americans think about African-Americans from New York. So he's very much writing from a sympathetic perspective. He's much more in the piece. The point of view is much more personal. Probably that's because it's a really interesting way to wrestle with these issues. Probably it's because he had less access to the subject. So sometimes it's a tactical decision. So you have a profile there.

I guess those are the big stories there. There's no set way that we deal with point of view. Implicitly, in every story, we're thinking about point of view. Even in the book reviews, a lot of our best book reviews have very strong points of view. Two of our best known and I would say most popular although a lot of people hate them, too. Either you love to read them, or you read them because you love to hate them are Caitlin Flanagan and Sandra Tsing Loh. When they do a book review, they're not just reviewing the book, they're not even just writing an essay about books. They will take books as an occasion for a larger cultural essay where they'll talk about breastfeeding or women and money or

father-daughter relationships or any number of other things. With both Caitlin and Sandra, they'll both use personal experience. If Caitlin is writing a profile of Katie Couric, a review about a book of Katie Couric, she'll then talk about her own experience watching the "Today Show" and what a kind of significant cultural touchstone is that show for women who are stay-at-home moms. So it's incredibly personal. That will be balanced by other book reviews that are completely and truly analytical. Again, in this issue, I believe, you have have Ben Schwarz writing a completely analytical piece. The idea is to talk about what is Obama's foreign policy ideology, and what should it be? Ben Schwarz is analyzing that by using a couple of recent books.

Is there a house voice or house tone that travels through?

No. There used to be a little bit of one, but we almost explicitly disavow that. And to the extent that when we describe what makes *The Atlantic* unique or what differentiates it from say *The New Yorker*. *The New Yorker's* absolutely a terrific magazine, and it has many of the best writers in the country. But there tends to be, there's a definite *New Yorker* tone. And it's not that they never deviate from it. But a lot of the politics tends to be of an Upper West Side, liberal slant. The writing is often subdued. Anthony Lane is a pretty lively writer, but there's kind of a *New Yorker* voice, which is reassuring and arch and elegant. We very much, and this is reflected both in the range of political viewpoints and ideologies that we represent, we'll have people who are extremely conservative making conservative arguments and people who are extremely liberal making liberal arguments side by side in the same issue. That's also reflected in style and voice. There's a quote that we use from 1857 when the magazine was founded. Their kind of founding statement, they say, "We should be of no party or clique." They meant that kind of politically. They weren't going to associate with any kind of single school or political party. But we also, there's no single *Atlantic* voice. We are lively, smart voices talking to each other. Now, there is kind of a sensibility, which is a little bit different. It's tricky. What is *The Atlantic* sensibility? It's the curious mind. You're always thinking about who the ideal reader is, someone who's very curious, who has a lively mind, a lot of interests, wants to read in the same issue about Guitar Hero and the future of reality TV and also defense policy and economics and theology. So in the sensibility, it's hard to define. But it's smart, concerned with ideas. And it's the sort of sensibility that would appeal to that kind of reader. It's almost easier to define it in terms of the reader. As opposed to a lot of places, certainly to newspaper, where there's a newspaper voice or a *Wall Street Journal* voice or even *Esquire* or *Maxim*, there's a distinctive tone. We have our own tone, but it's not reflected by a uniformity of voice or point of view.

So you really encourage all of your writers to take a very individualized point of view?

Yes. And more so now than maybe in the past. But yeah, very much so. Personally, I tend to think that this isn't always the case. Strong voices can be loud and annoying, but a lot of the best writing. Again, what makes Caitlin and Sandra so good is that they have such distinctive voices, and they're very good at turning phrases and things like that. Every line you're reading of theirs is so distinctively them. They have to be very smart, insightful acute observers of social issues and things. They always have interesting

insights, but it's the pairing of those insights with their own experience, and that's all folded into their voice. And that's what makes some of the best writing. I think that's true in fiction and in nonfiction also.

When you have a writer who is struggling with tone and voice and perhaps an overriding point of view, how do you help them?

It completely depends on the particular struggle or predicament that they're having. Sometimes it's simple. It's just a question of you read it through and you realize, well this paragraph doesn't ... You've switched tones here, and this feels inappropriate. Sometimes it's just changing a few words here and there can change the tone or taking something out where it feels off. If it's more fundamental than that, there are all kinds of different things you can do. If someone's really struggling, you can say well here, read this piece. This is by this other person. You want to be doing something like this. You're not saying copy this voice, but here's something like you were trying to do, and can you see what they were getting at? All editors I think have different ways of doing it. What I find sometimes helps is sometimes they've gotten off on the wrong foot. So much depends on the beginning of the piece. That's where in the first few sentences and paragraphs you're establishing the voice. Often I'll find, what if we took at this thing buried deep in the last third of the piece and took that to the top? And then all of a sudden, when you put that on the top, it's more engaging. You're drawing the reader in and realize well actually, all the other pieces start to fit together in a different way. Sometimes that doesn't work. Sometimes you disassemble the thing, and it's in pieces like the car all over the shop. Sometimes that can actually sort things out helpfully and help establish a flow. A lot of it for me is tricky, especially if you're trying to make an argument. If the piece is making an argument about policy or politics, to some extent the piece is going to be dictated by the logic of the argument. For me though, as a reader, I get bored very easily, which I think is a useful trait in an editor. If you have your attention flagging you're like what's the problem here? So for me, a lot of it is flow and slight changes of tone or key so you can keep the reader's interest. So I will often try to figure out how can you literally engage them from this paragraph to the next paragraph to the next paragraph. And that sometimes means doing funny things with the argument, and that's where it gets tricky. With essays, where you're not making an argument or the argument is implicit, or with a lot of essays you'll be taking something, turning it around and looking at it in different ways. Sometimes just taking the whole thing apart and establishing a better flow will help it and make it more, ultimately more convincing to the reader than if you had a very schematic outline. You can always outline things like, we'll sometimes do that, we'll take the piece and say, OK well I think you should to this first. Actually, the section you have at the end should be second. And try this. It's hard though. Obviously so much of, like everything, is practice, and you get better and better. On the other hand, voice can't really be taught and point of view. Some people kind of get it, and some people don't. And there are some writers that just, they're going to deliver the facts, they're great reporters and you have to let the facts stand for themselves. You can add a little bit of voice, but in that case, the point of view is just going to be much more newspaperish and straight facts. In those cases, you're counting on not the quality of the

prose or the voice but the inherent interest of the facts and the reporting or the key whizness of the insight or just the suspense of the story.

Do you think that the tone and voice... is that something that develops over time?

I think some people naturally have it, and some people don't. It can develop over time. We have writers who start to find their voice and come into their own. So it does develop over time. I don't really know how to teach it. Again, it's practice. I think a lot of it is reading. I don't know if you do this in graduate school yourself, but in fiction writing programs, a lot of that is work-shopping things and trying to find voice. There you're kind of, fiction's different because you're often impersonating someone else's voice that is completely different from your own idiosyncratic voice.

What are the advantages to taking a point of view and a voice in your work?

Again, for magazines, it sets them apart. This is kind of personal predilection, and I think it's one that a lot of people must share or they wouldn't buy magazines. It adds a dimension to the writing and ideas that like a newspaper piece, tends not to have. By bringing that, its very personal voice or point of view, it adds relatability. It allows the reader to sympathize more. It can be an extra hand out to the reader to kind of help where you're doing something that's explanatory journalism. If you're just doing straight explanation it becomes more like a textbook, and it's drier. It's almost like reaching out your hand and saying, "Let me take you along on this journey with me." So there's that advantage. A lot of it is that it can be more interesting. And it can lead to more vivid point of view, too. If you're really deep in the story, if you make yourself a protagonist or if you are doing it from the perspective, if you're reporting it in third person but are very much in the head of your subject. Newspaper reporting can do that too, but again you have more liberty to do it in a book or a magazine piece, particularly if it's really juicy narrative. That's why I think a lot of magazine stories end up getting options for movies.

Now what are the disadvantages?

I think there are disadvantages one can point to. I don't see them as disadvantages. The main one is that newspapers have actually more and more moved in a magazine direction by doing more analysis and doing more voice. I think that's less an influence of magazines but more of blogs, which are all voice. Newspapers can at least fall back on, there's more of an appearance of objectivity and therefore of accuracy. The reason why I don't know if I buy that that much is that there are plenty of newspaper stories that turn out to have been not accurate or to have been biased. It's just it was sort of hidden in the veneer of the reporting, in the on one hand, on the other hand. There are plenty of magazine articles that are biased, but a good magazine article will be explicit about its bias or can make a bias part of a story itself. And in some ways, it's more honest. Again, newspapers, for them, their almost theory of being is so much built on your reporting the facts in a dispassionate, accurate, objective way. For some people that's clearer and easier to understand and gives them more faith in newspaper reporting. There are times when a point of view can get in the way of a story. A lot of beginning writers are trying so hard to be jazzy or to impose voice that they overwrite, or they get in the way. But I think really good point of view reporting and writing in my mind is almost

always better or more interesting than just flat point of viewless ... it's impossible ... even newspapers have a point of view, it's just kind of a more neutral one.

Do you think point of view is in conflict with objectivity or can they coexist?

That's a really interesting question. No, I think they coexist, but it's complicated. I think there's no such thing as objectivity. There's biased magazine writing. There's biased newspaper writing. And there's bad biased newspaper writing, and there's good ... The magazine writing is more honest and open in its bias. And again, most newspaper reporting, it does aspire to a state of objectivity but often that can distort, too, because you're freer to make judgments in a typical magazine story than you are in a newspaper one. What you can end up with in a newspaper story is you're just saying well, Hitler says or these holocaust survivors say ... You can come up with these extreme situations where if you're quoting on the one hand, on the other hand, you're kind of giving equal voice to these things that are not morally equivalent. Again, the best newspaper reporters know how to get around that, but it's still kind of a bogus objectivity. And you're still only reporting what you see, and you're quoting people you have to talk to. Again, I think the best newspaper reporters do strive for objectivity and are largely objective. So the question is somehow magazine writing less objective? Sometimes it's explicitly less objective, but that makes it more honest. This is not a direct analogy, but a lot of newspapers and magazines have policies about if you're a journalist or an editor, whether you can vote for a political candidate. The simple rule is you're not allowed to make political donations. You're not allowed to vote because you're a journalist, and you need to stay objective. I understand the logic for that rule. It's simple. But really what it's avoiding is the appearance of conflict of interest because in reality, if I'm a newspaper reporter, I still have my biases. I'm just not allowed to exhibit them. So that's why I think *The New Yorker*, they allow all of their reporters to donate to whoever they want, it's just as long as they're transparent about it and fess up to it. I think that's a much more sophisticated and enlightened way of doing it. Because again you're owning your bias and hopefully controlling for it and presenting it in a way that the reader can filter it out or they can discount you because of your bias. And that's kind of the policy that we have, too. So I think it's a bit of a false dichotomy, but I also understand that in the public understanding of it there are things that are the facts, and there are things that have point of view. But again, blogs throw the whole thing off. There are some that I'm sure just are aggregating, but there are so many that are just all argumentation, all sharpened polarization. That is a really interesting area.

So there's almost an issue of transparency that makes it more honest?

Yes. I think so. And again it's not like in every article that Caitlin Flanagan writes or Jeffery Goldberg writes that they're saying here are my biases. But they're wearing their biases and their voice on their sleeve rather than sublimating them. I tend to think it's more ... It gives you more to grab on to than the just-the-facts-maam typical newspaper story.

What do you try not to do with voice and point of view?

There's a danger than you can become voice for voice sake. And every once in a while, you can get away with that if someone's voice is so entertaining, and they're doing shtick. A little of that goes a long way. A really skillful writer can sometimes disguise the fact that they don't have anything to say. And we don't want to do that. That's one thing we're trying to avoid. But other than that I don't think there's anything we're trying to not do with point of view.

How does point of view come into story selection and editorial mix? Does it?

No it does. Absolutely. As I was saying, when we're looking at story selection, the most obvious thing is we don't want in any given issue, unless there's some special occasion for it, all pieces about Africa or only pieces about foreign policy or only pieces about the economy. We want a diversity in subject matter. But there are other forms of diversity, too. We want, and part of it is a superficial thing, but we don't want all men or all women or all white people. So you're always looking for sort of a diversity. Those perspectives help create interesting conversation and they're voiced. When you get down to the other layers of the mix, it's like we're putting together a meal. We don't want a recipe that's all the same ingredients. You want different colors and textures and flavors and seasonings. The analogy in the magazine, you want things that are, as I was saying before, the analytical piece, the personal essay, the very serious piece, the light piece. It's balancing all these different kinds of things. And that's very much where point of view is. If you have somebody who's strongly from the left in a given issue, you also want someone from the right or at least in the next issue. And that's political. But if you have somebody who's arguing a very feminist perspective in one issue, you might be entering to have somebody from an anti-feminist perspective. And it's more than, and that's just sort of making it schematically, ideologically balancing, it's much more like, you don't want to have a long wonky piece followed by another long wonky piece. If there's going to be a long wonky piece, you want to follow that with something that's very narrative and lively and that's much more from a cinematic point of view. And then maybe follow that up with something that's short and funny, and that's from the humorous perspective. It's all about point of view in putting together the mix.

Do point of view and voice affect credibility with readers?

I think it depends on the reader. I think our ideal readers and most of the readers we have it affects it in a positive way. They're trusting us to be honest brokers for presenting a range of smart, we're not going to present them anything that's stupid or not well reasoned or that's just crazy. Unless it's crazy in a really, really interesting way. And then hopefully they can pick up that we kind of think it's crazy. More often, I think they think that we are, again, we're of no party of clique. We're just presenting interesting ideas. I think for people who are entrenched in one camp or the other. They don't want to hear the other point of view. They're going to read only the, conservatives who only read *The National Review* or liberals who only read *The Nation*. And the fact that we publish something that's not to their ideology makes us instantly suspect, and we are apostates to the cause. That probably does hurt our credibility with them. Having worked at the American Prospect, which does a lot of good stuff and is a good magazine, but in some ways, I think the ideological magazines are less credible because you already know

where most of their stories, they're telling the same stories over and over again from whichever perspective. They're just having to find new ways to justify defending social security on one side or privatizing health care or making the case for big government. There are lots of interesting arguments that can be rehashed, and sometimes there are new things to add, but it's the same thing over and over again. There's no reason to it. I think this is where as a general-interest magazine, and as a magazine with a variety of points of view, we're different.

So you don't have to appeal necessarily to a certain demographic?

No. We're open to everyone. There are commercial things. It'd be great if all of our subscribers were rich and spent a lot of money. We tend to appeal to a demographic that's more educated. Statistically we have more readers with graduate degrees. And yet, most of our readers are going to be those who are very broad minded, are interested in having their mind stretched and challenged from lots of different perspectives. This is the challenge of being a general-interest magazine. A newspaper, well newspapers have huge problems of their own. But in the old days, if you lived in Boston, if you're the *Boston Globe*, your market is everybody who lives in Boston. If you're *Cat Fancy* magazine, your market is people who love cats. If you're a general-interest magazine, it's much more tricky. If you're a surfer magazine, you can sell surfer advertising. *Cat Fancy* can sell cat food advertising. But you can't sell general interests. It's more that you're selling, what does this demographic want to buy?

Is there a story that you can think of that really uses point of view and voice well?

This was a highly controversial one, but it had such a strong point of view. A piece called "Marry Him." A lot of people hated this article. It's all point of view. It's kind of an argument for settling down and getting married younger. She's writing it from the perspective that she's in her 40s. She's a single mom. She had a baby by artificial insemination, and she's basically saying that if I knew then what I know now, I would have married some of these guys that I was dating back then. It's really, really fun. It's very in your face. It's all voice. And that's why I think some people find it compulsively readable. Some people just absolutely hated it. Some people loved it. I think a lot of people loved it and hated it at the same time. But it's all point of view.

Now how was the process? Can you talk a bit about how this came to light?

She's a writer who, Laurie Gottlieb ... We've worked with her before, and she always has a very strong point of view. She's always very personal. She's writing about her own experiences. This came out of a conversation that she had with one of my colleagues, Ben Schwarz, where she was just sort of talking about, lamenting her love life. And he said, "Oh, you have an article here." He recognized that there was enough passion. A lot of times that's what the best heavily voiced pieces are, something the writer has a strong passion about. She clearly thought a lot about this, had a lot to say. The piece came in and it didn't really need ... We did some revisions. In this case, we almost had to pull it back a little bit. We didn't want to make the voice any less vivid or make the argument less stark or provocative, but there were some times where she would go so far that it almost, it did undermine the credibility a bit. We wanted it to be bracing

or provocative but without sort of undermining itself. Actually another one. This was a highly, highly unusual piece that got tons of attention. This is a very unusual magazine piece. And the not very interesting back story, it's basically a series of connections. We found out this guy submitted this piece to us, and he was a former speechwriter for the Bush White House. He was basically writing an attack, well it wasn't a straight attack, It was sort of this pained lament about one of his colleagues who he felt like was always stealing credit. It's almost like kind of a bitchy, caddy piece. But it's unbelievably well written. It has all kinds of insider ... Snark and bitchiness can always be sort of compelling as point of view, but we wouldn't do snark for snark's sake. But in this case, he's taking down a sort of figure that was sort of built up to be this thing that you read this and you're convinced Michael Gerson is really not all that. He's stealing a lot of credit. But also it gives you all kinds of fascinating insight into how speechwriting works, the collaborative nature of it. It gives you pictures of inside the Bush White House. The main thing, there's all kinds of high-minded justifications I could give you that are true for why we ran the piece, but what made it so delicious was this sort of very eloquent and anguished voice of this guy sort of saying this guy stole credit for all of the speeches that we were all writing together. It's an incredibly powerful piece and a kind of case study of human nature.

And how was the feedback? You said it got a lot of attention?

There was a front-page article in *The Washington Post*. It was news. It would be like if Barack Obama's wife said I hate my husband. It had insider newsiness. It was of interest to people in the political establishment. It was like catnip for them but also for anyone who can relate who worked with coworkers who were stealing credit. It was both newsy, it was on politics but it was also infinitely relatable in a universal psychological way. Those are probably the two extreme pieces in terms of point of view. And if we did only this all the time, and we couldn't. It's so rare that you find pieces that are so kind of pitch perfect and so strongly voiced. Just not that many people can write like that. Also, it would just be, if you were only reading pieces like this, you'd be blown back. It'd be very hard to do this cover story or this one with that kind of voice. When you're doing a serious thing, you sometimes need to, enough with the pyrotechnics that are distracting.

How do blogs affect the points of view in the publication?

That's an interesting question. That's not the reason why we've sort of ... We were just kind of looking ... We just thought it was the right thing to do for the magazine to establish market differentiation that we are strong voices from different perspectives. I think, generally, the reason you see much more analysis and more point of view writing creeping into newspapers is very much because of blogs. I happened to be at *The New York Times* one day a few years ago, or no was it? I've heard anyway from a lot of people, this was 2005, 2006, that they want more blogospheric writing. And it wasn't clear exactly what they meant by that, but I think it was two things. One is just that stuff that got picked up. Write things that get picked up by the blogosphere. But also write in a more bloggy style, which means voice, zingers, snark. To a certain extent, some of that is good, but I think a lot of that is bad. That's where you do start to get into a lot of the blogs there's not a lot of quality control. But it does lead to more vivid and more point of

viewed writing. So I do think overall that blogs have changed the culture into, print culture generally, into being more voiced and more point of viewed based.

What am I missing?

Like I said, we're not thinking in terms of we need a different point of view on such and such, but it is very much implicitly apart of every decision we make. Any story we're evaluating, again especially in composing the mix of stories for an issue, we're always thinking about point of view. I think there's almost no such thing as a point of viewless ... I mean everything has a point of view. I think that's kind of the meatiest part of what you're working on is the philosophical questions.

I remember I took this course in college on Horace, the Roman poet. Basically he said literature, he was talking about poetry, should entertain while instructing. And it's true. Often that's what we're trying to do. Spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down. With a piece like this, when you're dealing with something pretty heavy. How do you make it ... It needs to be clear. It needs to be accurate. But you also need to keep the reader reading. Within each piece, you're looking for that right balance. And with every issue, too, which is again why to keep them going through you need to pace it and have the purely entertaining piece right after the really heavy piece.

David Von Drehle, Editor-at-Large for *Time* Magazine

February 18, 2009
10 a.m. at Panera Bread in Kansas City, Mo.
1 hour and 30 minutes

Can you tell me a little bit about your background in journalism?

I'm a newspaper man and have a background that sounds a lot like yours. I was the editor of my high school paper and lucked into a job at the *Denver Post* while I was in high school. I went to college in Denver as well, so I kept working that job as a sports writer on nights and weekends and Sundays through college. Basically thought I was going to be a college professor. Did some graduate school, then I decided I wasn't going to do that. I went to work for the *Miami Herald* in the '80s. That was really the hottest place to be a young writer in the country. There were a number of top reporters and writers who were there at that time. It was an exciting place to be. I learned an enormous amount. And then I left the *Herald*. I was the New York correspondent, and they, this was in '89 or '90, were starting to do cost cutting, and they cut that position. I didn't really want to move back to Miami. I decided to get a job at *The Washington Post* as their New York bureau chief. From that, I became a national reporter. I did some editing. Had 15 years with the *Post* and then left there to go with *Time* about two and a half years ago now.

At Time what is your position?

At *Time*, I'm editor-at-large, which is misleading because I don't edit anything. But the at-large part is about right because I basically live anywhere I want and write

whatever we agree on. In an election year, like last year, there was a lot of politics. But now it's more ... Most of the stories tend to land on politics somehow, but when I left Washington, it was partly because I didn't want to just be a pundit or whatever the word is.

Right. You've been kind of all over the place in recent issues.

Yes. I like that. I think that I've always thought of myself as a general-assignment reporter. Since I was a kid, that's all I wanted to be. I have a short attention span, that's why I wound up in journalism because it is a way to be intensely curious and learn about something without having that become my life. So I can jump from one thing to the next.

So do you end up traveling quite a bit?

I didn't know what to expect, but the traveling has been very manageable. With four kids, I like to be at home as much as I can. I travel parts of a couple of weeks every month probably.

In your own words, how would you describe this notion of point of view?

I forget who it was, one of the preeminent journalists of the golden age, said something to the effect of, "I'm a newspaper man; I tell stories." And I feel like that this is what writing and reporting is about. It's communicating information and ideas, and the way the human mind is wired to process information most effectively, information and ideas, is through stories. And we see this. This is the way we teach our children. This is the way we pass down our religious traditions. This is what we powerfully respond to whether it's a story on film, a story in print or a story that we hear. Even if you're just in conversation with a friend and you say, "What happened to you today?" You don't go through an agenda list. Well at 9 o'clock, I met so and so. And then at 9:35, I left. No, you sort of tell a story about the interesting points of your day and what that meant to you or why that was interesting to you. Storytelling, to work, has to be compelling. It has to be in a voice and aimed at an audience. To me, point of view is a better word for authorial voice. And the various techniques of effective storytelling but with the purpose of conveying sincere ideas or honestly arrived at information that other people need.

I don't think that point of view is on the continuum of objectivity to subjectivity that we're taught in journalism school. I'm not sure point of view really fits on that continuum at all. And I've always had sort of an unorthodox view about this idea of objectivity in journalism because of the imperative of storytelling, that it needs structure and voice. It can't just be a list. The idea of the objective voice in writing is, I think, kind of a figment. I don't think there's such thing. But I do believe though that there is such thing as objectivity in reporting. What that means is sort of forming an honest and, in the philosophical sense, a disinterested approach to a subject. Not uninterested. You're passionately interested, but you don't take an interest in coming out any particular way. And that you honestly attempt to see the subject from multiple sides and attempt to see and understand the way different people involved in a story view it, how they feel about it, why they feel that way about it. And that in that fact-finding, fact-gathering process, you're as open to persuasion and new information as it's possible to be. And that to me is the objective process. Once you've done that, then you need to convey. Your job,

particularly as a magazine writer, but even in most good newspaper writing, your job is to try to get across some part of what you learned. And you want to do that in a compelling way because you want people to read all the way to the end. You want them to take away from it as well as you can what you were putting into it. The communication process is something over here, and I'm trying to get it in there in as close to the same form as I can. In order to do that, you have to, as a writer, learn and develop and practice and hone a lot of different techniques, which you can pull out, depending on the nature of the story. What I think goes on too much in journalism and causes a lot of people to mistrust it is that exactly the opposite goes on. People gather their information in a highly subjective way. And you've probably been asked in your own work, I know I've been asked a million times. I'm starting out a story, and I'll be interviewing somebody, and they'll say, "Well, What's your story? What are you writing?" And I'll say, " I don't know. That's why I'm here. If I knew what I was writing, I wouldn't waste my time or your time." But there are people who do that. They know exactly what they're going to write about something before they ever start into it. And their reporting process is a highly subjective project of collecting the information that will support their case and ignoring or distorting stuff that doesn't fit. Then they come along, and they write it in a very dispassionate sort of voice to try to make it sound as if they don't have a dog in the fight when of course they do. That's problematic to me and not well-voiced, compelling writing that is the end product of an honest attempt to find out what's really going on in the world. If that makes any sense at all.

Yes, it definitely does. So, in that sense, point of view and objectivity are not really in conflict?

No. I don't believe they are. Now that doesn't mean that you can't find writers whose strong point of view is not reflective of a subjective approach to their topic. You know, if you pick up a magazine like *National Review* on the right or *The Nation* on the left, you're going to have strong point of view in a lot of those stories. And at the same time, they are not objective pieces of journalism in those cases because the people know basically what they're going to find before they go in. So you can have both point of view and subjectivity marching hand and hand. But what I'm saying is the fact that there's a point of view in a story does not, to me, mean automatically that it's not an objective piece of journalism.

In your particular writing, how do you tend to you use point of view?

Well we're always using it whether we're explicit about it or not because unless you piece everything you have in your notebook into the piece, you're making choices about what you're putting in and what you're leaving out. You're making choices about what order you put things in. You're making choices about how you juxtapose things, this person's quote coming right after that particular fact or scene. Does that make the quote look stronger, make it look weaker? How are you working these things together? I guess where I primarily try to use point of view is first to put people in a place or with a character. My writing's not particularly descriptive, so more often it's me trying to explicitly hook my reader up with an idea. And lay it out. Here's a proposition, and I'm going to put it out here explicitly so that you know where I'm going. It might

immediately turn you off, but you can understand why the next leg of the story is going in the direction it's going because I'm trying to show you why I think this thing that I just said is true, how I've come to believe that. For me, I don't think of myself as a really ... I don't have as big a bag of tricks as a lot of writers I admire, so most of my stories are very ... they have some chronology that's identifiable to me, either it might be a physical journey, like I'm going from here to there, like that Lincoln piece is sort of built around visiting the different places he lived in his life and the monuments and memorials. I wrote a piece last fall about white voters, and with Obama, there was literally a drive in a car meeting people. It can be a chronological journey, first this happened, then this happened, then that happened. But, you know, I'm not real sophisticated about using flashbacks, multiple layers and that kind of thing. I tend to kind of go bup, bup, bup, bup, and then figure out where I'm going to hang the little decorations and the points and ideas that I want to hang along that journey. In that sense, my point of view comes through in this sort of trying to take the reader by the hand and saying let's go along this path. That would be the way I use it. Sometimes the easiest way to say, "Here's an idea. I think you should consider it," is just to explicitly lay it out there, and it feels or sounds like an authorial point of view, I think, as well.

Now how does your voice come into this? In a piece, for instance, like the Obama "Person of the Year" piece where you have a little bit of that chronology, but there are a lot of really good instances of voice throughout. I marked this paragraph right here. That stood out as having really strong voice. How are those decisions made?

That's really kind of the nut of the piece arguably. The whole piece hangs right around that. The question of the piece was why this impossible thing had happened and not just happened but happened in a big way. Why did it happen? And it occurred to me more and more as the campaign went on that, and particularly after the way the public reacted to the meltdown, the response of the two candidates and the debates, all that happened at once, and none of it involved ... We spent so much time, by we I mean the political press, so much time in the campaign, focusing on Obama's stage presence, charisma and, you know, even his opponents. Hillary really thought the way to get at him was, "Oh, it's just talk, pretty words." And so I came to the conclusion that really kind of the exact opposite thing had happened, That he pulled this off because he ran better than any of the rest of them, a lot better and by the metrics that I think we've always applied to a successful campaign: well organized, well fundraised. His message discipline was better and quicker to come to the right response, opportunities and challenges. He and his gang made fewer mistakes. They cleaned up their mistakes faster, you know, just all those things. And so that became the point of the piece. The challenge of the piece was that no one on the face of planet Earth was going to be remotely surprised that he was on the cover as person of the year. So we have to say something that hopefully some people have not said before. And so what we did was turn that on his head. No, he didn't win because he talked so good. He won because these nuts and bolts blocking and tackling things. So that needed to be said explicitly at some point. And so if you're going to say something explicitly, you want to say it as powerfully and as well as you can. And then the reader is going to have to, ultimately, in this process of getting something from my head into your head, somewhere out in here it stops being mine and starts being yours. So

the reader's going to read that paragraph, and it's either going to resonate, and they're going to say you know, yeah, I think that's right. Or they're going to say that's bullshit, and that's fine, too. That's part of the communication process.

To get into specifics, magazines are more free to do this, and it's more important for magazines to do it. Newspapers, and this is all changing with the collapse of the monopoly newspaper, but in my lifetime and in the beginning of your career, we were in this era where the newspaper business had essentially become a series of regional monopolies. There are few two-newspaper towns, not many, and I think New York was the only four-newspaper town. And even there, you know, only the two tabs were competitive. So there were these monopolies. And if you look at how a monopoly has to behave vis-à-vis its customers, once you're a monopoly you're not starting with a target audience and trying to build it anymore. You're trying to serve everybody. Think about the companies that actually serve everybody. It's the electric company, the gas company, maybe McDonald's. It's bland. You've go to be bland. You've got to be politically bland. Your foods gotta taste bland. It's gotta be the same because your goal is to no longer pull people in; it's to avoid pissing people off and having them go away. So that's what newspapers had to do. They had to not piss people off. Magazines have never been in that business. There's never been a magazine trying to get everybody. Even *Time* magazine, which has a huge audience by magazine standards, or *Reader's Digest* still has a point of view. It's never trying to be all things to all people. And so a magazine writer, in particular, has to accept the idea that one of the things that's going to happen is some people are going to read your story and say bullshit. I don't buy it. I think you've got it wrong. And so given that that's the way, you may as well make your piece as strong as it can be, as interesting, as engaging. You may as well put your own cards out on the table. I'm probably still learning how to do that compared to somebody like Tom Junod who's done it forever. Does that answer your question?

Definitely and that leads well into my next one, which is more about Time. Rick Stengel, and I'll talk to him later, has been very vocal about point of view. And this is all by coincidence. Time is being a bit different in what it's doing. How would you describe how Time is approaching point of view and how that affects the writing you're doing?

Well *Time*, and Rick is better to talk about this, so I'll give you background. Officially, he's better. All the newsweeklies are under pressure.

And they're all changing.

Yes. Part of the pressure is cultural. Everything has sped up, so what exactly, who needs a once-a-week news summary anymore? Part of it's competitive because once-a-week news summaries are being provided. That's what the Sunday *New York Times* is. That's what Sunday CNN is in one way a news summary. And then part of it is commercial. In a competitive market, the economics of that business are not what they used to be. So part of what *Time* is trying to do is driven by an affirmative sense that we need to reinvent the magazine. Part of it, to be candid with you, I wouldn't want to be quoted on this, is driven by the unwelcome, impulsive fact that they have to figure out how to produce a magazine that has *Time* DNA but is producing it with far fewer people than before. And I don't know how much you know about the way *Time* was produced

for 75, 80 years until recently, but it was clearly, it made sense at some point, but it was kind of insane. They had hundreds of reporters. They were called reporters, all over the world. These reporters would report and report and report and they would write long what were called files about what was going on in their place in the world whether it's the White House, the Treasury department, or Congress or Rome or China or Kansas City, wherever they were. And they would send these enormous files, hundreds of thousands of words a week to New York. And in New York, there was a building full of people called writers. And the writers never reported anything. They never went anywhere except out to lunch, but they had learned how to take this massive material and stuff they could get from books and the research department and their own creative heads, and they would then write pieces that the editors would decide, like we need a piece out of the White House, they would take all this stuff and they would write it into a voice that was ... The best of them had identifiable, individual voices, but it was far more important that all of it be a kind of homogenized *Time* voice. And then after they filed their copy, then there was this huge layer of editors, fact checkers, copy editors, who would then further homogenize it. At the end of that process, you'd have a *Time* magazine.

But there were bylines, right?

For a long time, no. For many years, there were no bylines. But then they brought in bylines, and there were great, great cover story writers like George Church and Auto Friedrich. Marvelous writer, Auto wrote hundreds of cover stories. The only remaining really great classic *Time* cover writer, she's the last of the breed is Nancy Gibbs. Nancy is making this transition to where she does some of her own reporting now. But you can see how it would take a lot of money to keep that operation going.

So wait, Nancy Gibbs is still part of that old breed?

She spent 20 years as that old breed, but she has been able to make that transition. And there's really none of, most of the others have gone. So as the economics of the business changed, they've had to cut the staff enormously. And that's gone primarily. And so that is driving the culture in the direction that it ought to go anyway to be a better magazine for this day in age, which is for people like me, who report their own stories. So if I do a person of the year cover, I don't require any reporters. The stories of the old days are great if you can get ... But you know, people would ... Nancy would be a good person to try to talk to. You should call her. She's very smart, and she's worked in both eras. She told me an interesting story recently. When she first got there, there was almost a point of pride of the cover story writers that you would not take any identifiable language from any of the reporter files. So she said that some weeks she would get 40 or 50,000 words, that's half a book, in files and for a 3- or 4,000-word story, and literally none of it would end up in the magazine. It's just nuts. So anyway, that's where *Time* is headed. There's no demand anymore or very little demand for that homogenized voice, and the economics no longer support the apparatus. So *Time* is trying to make this change from the old to the new, and the way they're doing it is mainly been by hiring people, me, Michael Grunwald. And then repurposing some other people, some old dogs that can learn new tricks like Nancy, Michael Duffy. And I don't think anybody would say we're

there yet. Some weeks it sounds a lot like the old *Time* magazine. Other weeks it sounds like something different. We're still trying to figure out exactly what the new *Time* magazine should be and what it should sound like. But that's the idea behind it.

And how is the voice changing? If you're going away from homogenized, is it really becoming more individualized with different writers?

Yeah, I think that's the idea. My stories, I think people are happy, the folks who are on board, are happy with the idea that from week to week my story is going to sound different from Mike's story, which is going to sound different from Nancy's story. And that if you threw the three of us at the same topic, you'd wind up with three completely different stories. I think the old idea at *Time* was that there was a *Time* story to be done on any subject, any given week, and that the job of the editors and the writers was to get that particular story done and that there was a way it was done and that ...

It didn't really matter who wrote it.

It didn't. In theory, it was sort of interchangeable. That is what we're now moving against. Mike Grunwald and I are good friends. I really admire him. And I think the same would be true. But you could pick any subject in the world, and the two of us would never go at it from the same direction. Mike would find out whatever I thought about it, and then he would go write a different story. So what we need to be successful is to be able to hire a few more of the right people and then develop a system of good one-off pieces from freelance writers or professors or alumnus. You know, Walter Isaacson's newspaper story, that was good. That's another thing that is changing is that Walter's obviously got deep ties to *Time*. I think, in the future, it will be possible for writers who have very tenuous relationships to the place to get stories in the magazine and even on the cover. That's something that you could say appeals to Rick and seems to fit into his vision for *Time*. And that would not have been … In the old days, *Time* real estate belonged to *Time*. Anyway. That's about as articulate as I can be about what's very much a work in progress.

What are the advantages to taking a point of view in writing and this whole transition?

From a survivability standpoint, it's cheaper. When *Time* hired me, and I'm well paid for a journalist, the cold, hard, ugly truth is that they saved a boatload of money because they closed four of five bureaus around the country and stuck me out here so they can say they've got somebody between the coasts. But I'm sure, I'm just guessing, they must have saved millions of dollars. So survivability from the business end. But also in this ... If you take what's going on in the business and put it instead of on a 10- or 20-year continuum and put it on a 100-year continuum, 150-year continuum, what you see is that if you have, what they would call in business school a barrier to entry, basically how much it costs to get into a business. There were low barriers of entry in journalism legitimately is a lot of journalism, a lot of outlets. Go back to the 19th century and look at the communications business, which was mostly dailies and weeklies in those days, and there were a jillion of them. I wrote a book once that said in the first decade in the 20th century, and when I went to do the research in the Library of Congress newspaper archive, they had microfilm on something like 20 something New York City papers in

that period. Not all of them covered the whole period, you know, they'd come into business, go out of business. But there were lots and lots of newspapers in New York. When radio and then TV came in, there was limited broadcast spectrum, which the government controlled, so the barrier to entry became very high. You could only have as many radio stations in a town or an area as you could get spectrum for. Then when you went over to broadcast TV, there were only three winners. And that then had the subsidiary effect of consolidating the newspaper business as well, so that by the time I come along as a kid growing up, there were two newspapers in our town, which was one more than in a lot of towns. And there were three network TV stations and one independent and one PBS. So there were five TV stations and two newspapers. We talked about the effect that that has, homogenizing voice, taking political opinions out because you're going to drive people away. Now we're out here where barriers of entry are basically zero again. You can start a blog, what does that cost? I don't even know. To get that blogging tool. Even to start up a whole operation, Politico for example, a huge success for a start-up. I don't know what they've capitalized that at, but its infinitesimal compared to launching a newspaper that could compete with *The Washington Post* in that same market. So what characterized that era is also going to characterize this era, and that's points of view, partisan positions, ferociously serving the needs of your audience as opposed to trying to reach everybody and appeal to everybody. Giving people, being more what we would have called, being more dramatic, more compelling, more sensational, depending on your audience. Highbrow is going to be higher. Lowbrow is going to be lower because we don't have this homogenizing of the industry. So where does *Time* fit in that? We've got to figure out who reads us, why they read us, and what they want from us and do that better. And stop the extent that we're trying to be the one-stop weekly for everybody in America. That goal just doesn't make any sense for anybody anymore, I don't believe. So point of view, voice comes in to the extent that we are much more now writers, journalists, serving a particular audience. And the best way to do that, again, is to communicate effectively with them and honestly and straightforwardly. As I talk about that, you can see all the pitfalls of it. You start to be edited by your readers instead of by yourselves. You start massaging and appealing to the preconceived biases of your audience. I don't know what any of your preconceived biases are, but if you read Frank Rich every Sunday in *The New York Times*, then you're just never going to be surprised by him. If you think like Frank Rich, you're going to love that column every week. If you love to hate him, you're going to get the entertainment. But you're not going to go there looking for a surprise or some new piece of information or a new take on something. I feel that way about Rick Hertzberg in The New Yorker, writing their lead pieces on ... I admire him. He's a terrific writer, fantastic writer and sharp thinker. But I'm not sure I feel like he's dealing off the top of the deck every week because he's never a surprise. In a way, they think they know what I think because I subscribe to the magazine, and they're kind of pandering to me. You've got to be careful about the pander factor. That's the pitfall.

So really targeting too much to your target audience? Just saying what they want to hear?

I guess it's how you define your audience. I like to think, based on nothing, that I'm writing for people who are fair minded and willing to look at something in a different way, from a couple of different sides. And then at the end of that process, I'll tell them what I think or where I came out. But I hope they feel that piece has contained enough of, I've shown enough of my work that they have the tools they need to come to a different conclusion. Does that make any sense?

Yes. Now what do you try not to do with your point of view and your voice?

What I try not to do number one is make assertions or claims that my readers have no way of evaluating for themselves. You can't show everything that goes into a conclusion, but you can show sort of what your thought process was, particularly if you say here's where I started out, here's where I ended up. So that's one. I try not to write in a voice that is, as I've gotten older, I think I'm less brass or mean, whatever the word would be. I think I was a lot meaner writer as a young guy than I am now. I'm trying to be less snarky. I think snark is a problem. What else? I try not to condescend to my readers or to people who aren't reading. That clubby sort of thing that a lot of magazines do that like well all of us, everybody who's reading this magazine, we're all smart, and we all know what's right in the world, and we're all good and moral. It's those other people who are terrible and wrong about everything. It's the in group versus the out group. I try not to do that. That's roughly it. My heroes as a writer have somehow managed to combine voice with clarity. The voice is in service of clarity. To me, the best essay writer in English, certainly modern English, is George Orwell, who said good prose is like a windowpane. If you think about what is a windowpane, well, it's clear; you can see through it; you can see what's on the other side. But it also is a frame. A windowpane while it's showing you something, it's not showing you everything. It's choosing in a way. It's framing what you see. But it's not obscuring what it's trying to show you. To me, that's a great definition of a goal, and sometimes voice really is clarifying. It's saying here look at this. But a lot of voiced writing seems to me to become an impediment to seeing what is being written about. That doesn't mean it's not entertaining. You ever read a piece by Tom Wolfe called ... It's the first great piece about stock car racing, now called NASCAR, about Junior Johnson. Unspeakably, unbelievably great piece. Just mind-boggling. Voiced fairly well. You would never read that and wonder who wrote it. It's a Tom Wolfe piece. But I feel like he's giving me a really clear wonderful look at what stock car racing is, where it came from, what the culture is, how it came to be the sport of the good ol' boy. Another writer I love, Hunter Thompson, take another Southern sports icon. His piece about going to the Kentucky Derby. You don't have a real good picture of what the Kentucky Derby is at the end of that, but you've been on a really interesting trip. You've encountered some wild, fun reading. But, you know, that's a piece about Hunter Thompson. So to the extent that's helpful ... I'm not a hundredth a writer Tom Wolfe is, but that's the direction I'd want to go rather than the other.

Is there a piece you can point to where you think you really did a good job with point of view or is one of your stronger Time pieces perhaps?

Person of the year. That piece has a strong argument in it, an authorial voice but I hope shows sort of why I got there. There was a piece I did early in my time there. It was

called, “The Myth About Boys.” It was very controversial because it took on this idea that boys in society today are losers, failing, falling behind, oppressed by the educational system and all that. And there was a lot of first person in it, but I think, I hope it does a decent job of showing, of respecting that point of view but showing why I’m not sure that it’s true. It’s pretty straightforward piece. It’s not a fun read or anything. You could take a look at that.

How do you see blogs and online media changing things when you have things like Politico with very strong voice, how does that change the craft for magazines and how writers take a point of view? Or does it?

I don’t blog. I read a fair number of blogs, and I think some of them are really good, so I’m not anti. But I also tend to think that traditional journalism is in such a swivet right now about what to do and who we are that we have a tendency to make, to get panicky and make a big deal out of not necessarily big things. I think we’ve dramatically over emphasized the impact of blogging on what we do. A borderline successful blog can have 3,000 people who look at it. I’m not sure I have more than 3,000 people out of the 3 million who subscribe that read my pieces. So I’m not dissing it. But because we’ve been in a business that for years has had essentially zero feedback… Really, if you think of the old days in newspapers, it was a big project to give feedback to a story in the paper. You had to write the letter, address it, stamp it, send it in, and then it would be ignored. You’d get no answer. No response. It was just sending it into a black hole. So very few people did it. It was fun to just write stuff, and you could be under the impression that nobody read it, or everybody read it, and everybody agreed with you and thought you were wonderful. And now, here there is this instant feedback to everything we do. There’s a tendency to find it and obsess on it. I think that the narrative storytelling form of communication is, it goes way back to the days in the cave around the campfire. It is deeply wired in the human brain, and I don’t think it’s going to go away in five years because a relative handful of people are reading some blogs. But to do it well is very, very hard. You’ve worked at it. You’ve tried it. It ain’t easy. Very few people can do it. At some point in your life you should edit. Even at the highest levels of editing, I edited *The Washington Post* style section for four years. That’s one of the best written outlets for journalism in the world, and until you get on the other side of the curtain and see the crap that comes in from accomplished, professional writers, there are just very few people who can do it. There’s this thing that humanity has an appetite for that works called narrative, that’s hard to do, and very few people comparatively can master that craft. I think it’s important for those people to stick to their knitting, believe in what they do, and I think when the technological change shakes out, the appetite for what they do is still going to be there. They’ll figure out how the outlets get that to the people who want it. I mean, some blogs are very narrative. Joel Ochenbach has a blog, and virtually all of his entries are beautifully shaped into narrative pieces. You’ve seen other blogs like that, but the ones that aren’t, that are aggregators or provokes or propagandists or these other inter-club communication devices, they’re doing something different. And just because they may comment on what we’re doing doesn’t mean that ... It just is what it is. We shouldn’t decide, “Oh, we need to go do that thing instead of this thing that we’re already doing.” Politico’s very useful to me when I’m writing a politics story or covering a

politics story, but I don't think of them, as much as I admire a lot of people there, I don't think that they're doing the same thing I'm doing. Great. I wish them success. But I'm not going to change my thing because they're being successful. What the blogs are exposing is the fact that a lot of what even some magazines do is even more true of newspapers and a lot of TV is that a lot of what's being delivered is not good, well crafted narrative. It's stuff that can be commodified, can be done by anybody, and there is vulnerability and there has to be. Publications have to decide, are we going to compete with that? As Time.com has done with that feature called The Page. It's very competitive with aspects of what Politico does. Are you going to compete with it? Are you going to stop doing it? Those are the two choices. But If I'm going to be of any value to *Time* magazine, it's going to be by doing something that they're not doing, not by doing their thing better than they do it.

What am I missing?

I think those are good questions. I urge you not to fall ... There's a kind of a myth out there since we've gone on the topic of Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson, there's a sort of myth out there that those cats in that period, the new journalism invented point of view, and it didn't exist before that, and the world was bland and black and white, so they came in and lit up the sky and applied the techniques of the novel to ... I would urge you not to fall for that because there's been a tradition of vivid voice, nonfiction writing going way, way back probably to Homer. But certainly Mark Twain did a lot of nonfiction that sounds like Mark Twain. I mentioned Orwell. There was a magazine in the 1890s and early 1900s put out by an editor named S.S. McClure called *McClure's*. I mean, fabulous magazine. Probably the most interesting magazine I've ever read. As great as *The New Yorker* was in the '30s and '40s and '50s and early '60s, *McClure's* was just one fascinating, well-written article after another. And I wouldn't be surprised ... I bet the Missouri library has it on microfilm and microfiche. Some afternoon, take three hours and pull out six copies at random and just start reading. It's just fascinating stuff. Wonderfully reported, deeply reported but then written with a voice. And oftentimes as narratives. The work that Ida Tarbell did for them on Lincoln or on the Rockefeller fortune was just as vivid and voiced and deeply reported as anything *The New Yorke*r had in the golden age, you know, Rachel Carson or Truman Capote. And no, unfortunately there's nothing like it now. Versions of that appear in different places. It's stuff that newspapers did not do at all in that era, you know taking the long week view of things because they were so competitive on the daily story. And nowadays, newspapers do a lot. You've got these yearlong investigations into this industry or that. If you took the collective entries for the Pulitzer explanatory journalism category, bound them up, you'd have something like a year's wroth of the old *McClure's*, but no one publication does it the way they did it. But that would be my main thing. Absolutely there was a golden age of magazine writing in the '50s and '60s, even '70s. And the new journalism was part of it. Wolfe completely ignores the stuff that was going into *Sports Illustrated*. When I was a kid that was the best-written magazine. Yeah. Oh my god. That's where I learned whatever I know about writing came out of Dan Jenkins and Ray Blunt and George Plimpton. I'll be interested to read what you come up with. Are you forming any conclusions yet?

No. I'm trying to wait and not let any of my original theses come into it. I'm just looking for justification for point of view that's more than entertainment.

I just love the Jimmy Johnson piece so much and think it's such a classic. You look at that piece and say what would an unvoiced version of this look and sound like that's not narrative but says the origins of stock car racing came in the 1920s and '30s when prohibition was broad in the land and it was illegal, so people had to learn how to drive fast to get their booze.... How many people would have learned anything about NASCAR, and would we still be talking about that piece 40 years later? No.

It would have read like an encyclopedia entry.

Exactly. You're right, which is fine. I've got nothing against the encyclopedias. But people don't buy them for fun. They don't have them in dentists' waiting rooms. You know, to pick them up and read them. People don't take their *Encyclopedia Britannica* on an airplane with them. It's a different function. So yeah, it's not just entertainment. The entertainment is in service of something. What matters to me is the entertainment in service of a sincere attempt to communicate, or is it just a service to itself?

I also didn't want to believe that objectivity was completely impossible with this type of writing either.

Look, there are... If you want to know about slavery, you can read the work that David Brian Davis, Yale historian and number one guy on the history of slavery, and it's fantastic stuff. You can read *Huckleberry Finn*. There are certain kinds of information that you'll get from a David Brian Davis piece that you won't get from *Huckleberry Finn* and vice versa. But is *Huckleberry Finn* not … Is there no truth value to it? The tendency of academics is to say that because what we do is different, it needs to be either better or worse. I don't really buy into the better or worse distinction. Truer or less true. True in different ways. We can do a CAT scan and find out how your heart is beating, and we could investigate what your heart is feeling. One we could take a picture of, the other we can't. That doesn't make one of them any less true. So my beef with journalism education, you mean you put your finger on it, is that I think it's fine to teach students how to count up how many Republications have been quoted and how many Democrats have been quoted in a story and to develop tools for watching that, but to take the next step and say a story that has equal numbers is therefore more true than a story that doesn't have equal numbers, I draw the line at that. It's highly practiced by journalism professors who are doing content analyses.

Where it becomes pernicious is that as a reader and as a practitioner, I've found ... There are two problems I'm watching out for. One of them is people who clearly express in compelling ways what they think, believe, what they saw and did in the course of their story versus people who mask all of that under an apparatus called objectivity. Great work is done in both of those. Bad work is certainly done in both of those ways. To me, the far more dangerous bad work is done over here by people who have very strong views but pretend that they don't and use these numeric devices. Take a hot-button issue like abortion. In my career, I have never met a reporter at anything other than a right-wing publication, no newspaper, no TV station, no magazine, except for the right, I've never

met a reporter who thought it's important to cover that topic who didn't have a strong pro-choice bias. And yet in most cases, that bias is not clear. Who are we doing the favor for to say, "Well as long as you have a quote in there from some right-to-life group, that's kosher, and it's good, and it's true, and we're in favor of it. We'll applaud it in our schools of journalism." But then if that same person were to write a piece that said this is how I feel, then that would be, "Oh no, that's bad."

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